

Mary For Today's World



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Introduction

‘Whatever happened to Mary?’, asks Australian Catholic poet Noel Davis. You’ll find his answer to this question when you get to Meeting 9, but what about your answer? What’s become of Mary in your faith, your spirituality?

Mary, the mother of Jesus and mother of God, occupies an honoured place in our Catholic tradition and, of course, in our Teams tradition. We are, after all, Equipes Notre Dame. Living in Oceania in the 21st century, what can we learn from Mary about the challenges our society faces today? How can her experience and example support us in our faith journey? This discussion resource is designed to help us answer these questions. It focuses on the humanity of Mary and asks us ‘how do Mary’s actions inspire us in our daily lives today?’ She is like us; she is a person we can identify with. We recognise her as a woman of action and first among the faithful disciples of Jesus. Her example helps us to deal with the real problems of the world today.

This is why the theme of this resource is developed around the attitudes and teachings of Mary as found in Scripture, taking as a backdrop the writings of Pope Francis, especially *Amoris Laetitia* and *Fratelli Tutti*, the texts of our founder, Father Caffarel, and other complementary texts. The theme builds on the story of the wedding feast of Cana, and Mary’s observation that ‘they have no wine’, inviting us to think about where ‘wine’ is lacking in our current reality. We consider, for example, the people in our society who have no country (refugees), no home (homelessness), no family (loneliness), and other contemporary issues such as education, health care and concern for the environment.

Structure of each meeting

This resource consists of nine chapters, each one corresponding to a monthly Team meeting. For each chapter, there is material for each couple to read and discuss with each other before the meeting, followed by resources that can be used when the Team meets in its usual way.

Each chapter opens with a title, a set of objectives, and an image related to the topic of the meeting. This is followed by the material to be read by each Team member prior to the meeting. It consists of some introductory text, a passage from Scripture, an experience of a Teams person or couple, some texts for further reflection, and some questions that couples could use in their Sit Down for that month.

The material for the meeting itself include questions for discussion, and a short prayer service. These are suggestions only and Teams should feel free to modify them to suit their own situation. The prayer service includes the reading from Scripture that was part of the pre-meeting material, as well as some other forms of prayer, meditation, hymns or songs, and a time for sharing on the Endeavours. In most chapters, it is suggested that the concluding prayer be either the Magnificat or the prayer for the beatification of Fr Caffarel, the words of which can be found in the Appendix.

As we take up the challenge to serve those around us, we remember the words of Pope Francis to the Teams movement:

Indeed, I would like to insist on this missionary role of the Teams of Our Lady. Every committed couple certainly receives a great deal from its Team experience, and its conjugal life is deepened by refining itself through the spirituality of the Movement... I also exhort you to continue to be close to wounded families, who are so numerous today, due to unemployment, poverty, health problems, mourning, worry over a child, the imbalance caused by an estrangement or absence, a climate of violence. We must have the courage to come into contact with these families, in a discreet but generous way, materially, humanly or spiritually, in those circumstances where they are most vulnerable. (*Address to the Meeting of Equipos Notre Dame, Rome, 10 September 2015*)



Sr Maria Van Galen FMM

Meeting 1

They have no wine



In this painting by Vasili Nesterenko, a contemporary Russian artist (1934–2008), Jesus and Mary are central figures in a scene showing a typical Jewish wedding of the time, with many guests enjoying singing, dancing and drinking over several days. (Public domain image)

Objectives

The aim of this meeting is to give each Team member the opportunity to reflect on times in their lives when they needed the love and support of others by:

- ❖ Appreciating that Mary trusted her son to be generous and hospitable. Jesus was someone who cared about those in need and would support them to become all that they could be.
- ❖ Understanding that, as Jesus' mother, Mary has an intimate relationship with God. This relationship will guarantee that our prayers about our worries and needs will be heard by God.
- ❖ Reflecting on the role of the couple as a model of love for all to see.
- ❖ Experiencing the hospitality of the monthly Team meeting and reflecting on the central role of hospitality in the culture of Teams.

Before the Meeting

Introduction

The title of this meeting immediately brings to mind the wedding feast in Cana (John 2:1–11). Mary's responsibilities, as a Jewish woman of her time, were to care for the physical and emotional needs of everyone in her household. At her friends' wedding, she noticed that the wine was running out and that this would be shameful for the young couple on their special day. In full confidence, Mary said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you'. She knew her son well and expected him to be a generous and hospitable friend who would respond quietly to the couple's embarrassment. She interceded for the newly married couple and Jesus responded to meet their need, enabling the celebration to continue.

Mary is a reliable intercessor

We too can go to Mary with our needs and ask her to intercede on our behalf just as she did for the married couple in Cana. She teaches us to bring our needs before God as prayerful petitions, with confidence and trust. Indeed, the power of Mary's intercessions have been cherished by many throughout all Christendom. She is known as the first of the disciples, in part due to her willing and generous response to the Angel Gabriel, 'let it be done to me according to your word' (Luke 1:38). She cared deeply for her son. Throughout his life she supported him to continue his mission even to his death on the cross. (John 19:23–27). After his death, she did what she could to support his disciples and prayed with them at the time of the Ascension (Acts 1:14). Indeed, throughout her life, she was a constant and reliable support to others in their time of need, especially when 'they have no wine'.

Pope Francis reflects on this important quality of Mary: 'If we imitate Mary, we cannot sit with our arms crossed, just complaining or perhaps avoiding any effort so that others do what is our responsibility. Making a difference to others does not have to be done on a grand scale but entails doing everyday things with tenderness and mercy' (*Message to the Cuban Bishops Conference*, September 2014).

Becoming a model of hospitality in imitation of Mary

Married couples can follow the example set by Mary and Joseph who clearly understood the importance and power of welcoming people into their lives by sharing their love and showing their support in practical ways; they offer a precious role model for all married couples to follow.

When loving couples nurture and support each other and their children, to live 'life to the full' (John 10:10), they reflect the unity and beauty of deep love. This unity is expressed particularly in our sexual relationship when, with our Creator, our fruitfulness produces and nurtures new life. The dignity of couples as a loving sign is important for the Church and society. St Paul describes the love and unity of the couple as a sign of Christ's love for the Church (Ephesians 5:21–33). It is a visible sign of the love of God from all eternity.

This love challenges us to be generous and loving to all who may come into our lives. We learn about these qualities from our parents and other significant people like grandparents, teachers

and the many paid workers and volunteers who generously give of their time and effort to keep us safe and free from harm. They are central to our understanding of married spirituality which is reflected in the charism of the Teams Movement. Through love and generosity, couples can reach out to care for people in all forms of distress where the wine is lacking: poverty, homelessness, the horror of family and community violence, refugees and environmental disasters. Our monthly Team meeting is part of this way of living so that we and those around us are not left feeling empty and abandoned.

The Word of God

The Scriptures do not tell us a lot about Mary and the way she lived her life but this passage from John's Gospel gives us a powerful insight into the relationship she shared with her son.

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.' His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you'. Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, 'Fill the jars with water.' And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, 'Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward'. So, they took it. When the steward tasted the water that had become wine and did not know where it had come from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom and said to him, 'Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.' Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory and his disciples believed in him. After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother, his brothers and his disciples; and they remained there for a few days. (John 2:1–12)

Mary's heart goes out to the newly married couple. The wine was running out before the days of celebration had ended. She shows her support by asking her son to respond to their predicament. Reluctantly, he agrees and in doing so uses this miracle to teach us about the importance of intercession, of asking Mary in prayer to help us serve God in practical ways. Jesus had been well taught by Mary and Joseph to be a gracious and hospitable friend. Mary challenged her son to reach a greater level of giving than he may have felt comfortable with initially. Many times, she was challenged by the reality of her son's vocation but remained steadfastly loyal, giving and serving him to the end of her life and beyond. As parents, we often need to challenge our children and it takes real effort to act as Mary did in a loving and caring way.

The experience of a Teams member

Our relationship had developed and grown since our first meeting three years before. So, even though we had debts and very few possessions, we decided to get married soon after

my husband had finished his studies. Our parents were very happy about our marriage plans and gladly paid for the wedding reception. I made my own wedding dress and we had the reception in my aunt's garden. Our parents thought we had a good life ahead of us even though we were starting with very little. Our wedding guests understood this too, so we were very pleased to receive practical and useful gifts for the home we were setting up together.

We began our married life in a small furnished flat. Later on we took up the offer of a rented house close to my husband's work so he did not have to travel far especially when he was called out to work during the night. We were able to buy a mattress and a refrigerator and we ate our meals sitting on folding chairs at a card table. Married life was good. We enjoyed hosting my husband's parents, picnic style, in our new home. Then, sometime later, my parents came to visit from their home in another part of the country. They could see we were happy but they also saw our sparsely furnished home. We tried to reassure them that we didn't mind having an empty house and that we saw the furnishing of our home as an exciting long-term project. However, they were determined to help us and, finally, we were persuaded to go shopping with them to buy some furniture and a floor covering for our bare sitting room. We were overwhelmed by their generosity but it was wonderful to be able to provide more comfort in our home when we hosted our families and friends.

Whenever we hear the story of the Wedding Feast of Cana, we are reminded of our early married life. Indeed, we see ourselves reflected in the newly married couple. Obviously, it was very important to them that their guests had enough to eat and drink during the celebrations. John's gospel tells us that Mary noticed the couple's concern and discomfort so she responded to their need by asking her son to help them out. We can also understand from this gospel that she was hesitant to ask but took the risk because she knew her son would respond to her request. No doubt, the young couple would have been most grateful and felt completely overwhelmed by Jesus' generous and loving act of providing the best wine for the wedding guests, just as we were by the generosity of our parents.

Mary's behaviour at the wedding feast in Cana is a powerful role model for us. Over the years, there have been many times when we have become aware that our children are struggling either financially or in other ways. We have seen their need and, just as parents do, we have responded to their need as best we can even when it has been difficult to do so. Mary's example of sensitivity to the needs of others is something we should always remember. We can be confident we can turn to her whenever we are empty or our hearts are wounded and she will intercede on our behalf with our God.

More food for thought

Fr Caffarel

In Rome on 4 May 1970, St Pope Paul VI gave a powerful address to members of the Teams Movement. He shared his 'Concern for Hospitality' by saying 'we also wish, this morning, to draw your attention to hospitality, which is an outstanding form of the apostolate of the couple'. Fr Caffarel provided many explanatory notes on this address; these were published in 1988 by Jean and Annick Allemand in *Equipes Notre-Dame—Expansion and Mission of Christian Couples*. Fr Caffarel said:

It is a strange thing that, in this century, when one speaks so much about the apostolate of the laity, one so seldom hears about the virtue of hospitality which was so highly esteemed in centuries past and which is the glory of Oriental and Islamic civilisation. Pope Paul has no hesitation in telling the couples that it is an eminent and irreplaceable form of their apostolic union.

Pope Francis: *Amoris Laetitia*

In Chapter 4 of *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis explores the topic of love in marriage. He reflects on the importance of the sacrament we give to one another. Everything we do as a sacramental couple is a product of our love and mutual self-giving that manifests—makes present—God’s love into the world; we are his hands and feet and our children learn to be loving, hospitable friends and neighbours to others. He says:

Marriage is a precious sign, for ‘when a man and a woman celebrate the sacrament of marriage, God is, as it were, ‘mirrored’ in them; he impresses in them his own features and the indelible character of his love. Marriage is the icon of God’s love for us. Indeed, God is also communion: the three Persons of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit live eternally in perfect unity. And this is precisely the mystery of marriage: God makes of spouses one single existence.’ This has concrete daily consequences, because the spouses, ‘in virtue of the sacrament, are invested with a true and proper mission, so that, starting with the simple ordinary things of life they can make visible the love with which Christ loves his Church and continues to give his life for her. (*Amoris Laetitia*, 121).

Pope Francis: *Fratelli Tutti*

This important encyclical challenges us to be sisters and brothers to one another. Central to this is the way we welcome others. Pope Francis draws our attention to the teaching about welcome and hospitality and contrasts this with the many times our society fails to live up to Jesus’ new commandment ‘Love one another as I have loved you’ (John: 13:34–35; 15:12–17). He says:

Significantly, many small communities living in desert areas developed a remarkable system of welcoming pilgrims as an exercise of the sacred duty of hospitality. The medieval monastic communities did likewise, as we see from the Rule of Saint Benedict. While acknowledging that it might detract from the discipline and silence of monasteries, Benedict nonetheless insisted that ‘the poor and pilgrims be treated with the utmost care and attention’. (*Fratelli Tutti*, 90)

Hospitality was one specific way of rising to the challenge and the gift present in an encounter with those outside one’s own circle. The monks realised that the values they sought to cultivate had to be accompanied by a readiness to move beyond themselves in openness to others. (*Fratelli Tutti*, 68)

Question for the Sit Down

How do we show generosity and hospitality to others who come to our home or in the wider community such as our workplace, sporting club, etc?



The Team Meeting

Questions for discussion

- ❖ How does our mother Mary's intercession and discipleship inspire you?
- ❖ Alienation and loneliness have been common experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Share what you have done that helped you to manage hospitality and welcome when you have not been able to meet in person.
- ❖ How can we as a Team reach out to other couples in our parish and diocese to make them feel at home and welcome?
- ❖ What are the challenges for you as a couple to accept and welcome one another when you disagree?

We Pray Together

Opening prayer: A Prayer to the Creator

Leader: Let us begin by praying together the prayer with which Pope Francis concludes *Fratelli Tutti*:

Lord, Father of our human family,
you created all human beings equal in dignity.
Pour forth into our hearts a fraternal spirit,
and inspire in us a dream of renewed encounter, dialogue, justice and peace.
Move us to create healthier societies and a more dignified world,
a world without hunger, poverty, violence and war.
May our hearts be open to all the peoples and nations of the earth.
May we recognise the goodness and beauty that you have sown in each of us,
and thus forge bonds of unity, common projects, and shared dreams.
Amen.

Reading

We take some time to read and reflect on the passage from the Word of God in the discussion material for this meeting: 'The Wedding Feast at Cana' (John 2:1–12).

Prayer

Mother, help our faith!

Open our ears to hear God's word and to recognise his voice and call.

Awaken in us a desire to follow in his footsteps, to go forth from our own land and to receive his promise.

Help us to be touched by his love, that we may touch him in faith.

Help us to entrust ourselves fully to him and to believe in his love, especially at times of trial, beneath the shadow of the cross, when our faith is called to mature.

Sow in our faith the joy of the Risen One.

Remind us that those who believe are never alone.

Teach us to see all things with the eyes of Jesus, that he may be light for our path.

And may this light of faith always increase in us, until the dawn of that undying day, which is Christ himself, your Son, our Lord!

- Concluding prayer from Pope Francis' 2013 encyclical *Lumen Fidei*.

Sharing on the Endeavours

Share a little about your own life's journey in the context of the Endeavours, or in the context of the particular Endeavour chosen by the Team for this month.

Final prayer

Choose one of the following:

- ❖ Prayer for the Beatification of Father Caffarel
- ❖ Magnificat

See 'Prayers for the Meetings' at the end of this document.



Meeting 2

They have no education



Mary's role, to raise her child and guide him, was a total selfless act of love and trust in God.

Objectives

The aim of this meeting is to encourage each Team member to:

- ❖ Appreciate the role of Mary in educating Jesus; teaching him and ensuring he knew God as a loving Father.
- ❖ Recognise that not all people have the opportunity to access education.
- ❖ Follow Mary's example to continue to grow in knowledge and love of God and to help our children grow in faith.
- ❖ Learn the value of education as part of our spiritual growth.

Before the Meeting

Introduction

‘Each one of us can learn something from others. No-one is useless and no-one is expendable’ (Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 215).

More than seventy years ago, the United Nations passed a resolution to proclaim a Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 26 of this Declaration began with a clear and simple statement: ‘Everyone has a right to education’. The Declaration provided clear guidance to world leaders about the principles that every country should strive to uphold. However, in the decades since that declaration, the reality has been disappointing. Formal education continues to be lacking in many countries, despite ongoing concerns raised by human rights leaders.

These leaders also remind us of the importance of formal education. Nelson Mandela reminded us that ‘Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world’. These messages are accompanied by a more subtle message, that the purpose of education should be much more than just ‘going to school’. Education needs to develop the whole person. As Mahatma Gandhi observed, ‘By education I mean an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man—in body, mind and spirit’.

Pope Francis brought together these differing perspectives in a powerful message:

Education and upbringing, concern for others, a well-integrated view of life and spiritual growth: all these are essential for quality human relationships and for enabling society itself to react against injustices, aberrations and abuses of economic, technological, political and media power. (*Fratelli Tutti*, 167)

For us as Christians, faith education is key to our spiritual growth and to the ongoing deepening of our relationship with God. However, ‘education’ without ‘learning’ impoverishes the depth of our faith. Like Mary, it is only as we reflect on the lessons we are taught and apply these teachings to our own lives that we will come to know an ever-loving God that inspires us to grow in our relationship with her son, Jesus. Our formation begins as young children when much of our education comes through the family.

We reflect on Mary’s own learning as a child, when she was faithfully instructed in the Jewish faith by her own parents. It was through her early education that she began to develop her profound relationship with God. Later, this education would enable her to accept the invitation to be the Mother of God without fear or reservation. Mary’s response set the course for a future unknown to her at the time, but the enormous impact of her ‘yes’ continues to have a countless and fruitful influence on the lives of people today. Her free acceptance to be the Mother of God led Mary on a journey of deep learning and personal transformation as she remained with Jesus through the key events of his life. The challenge for us in our personal circumstances is not to be afraid to say ‘yes’, because trust is at the heart of faith.

We also reflect on Mary’s influence on the formation of Jesus from the time of his birth. Her own education about God would guide Jesus as he ‘grew in wisdom and favour before God’

(Luke 2:52). He was the Son of God, yet he came into the world born of a woman. He was nurtured by her love and protection, as a baby and as a child. It was Mary who provided Jesus with the first extraordinary foundations of education. She taught her young child about a loving God who cares deeply about everyone and especially the poor.

Today, Mary's example continues to provide inspiration to married couples who are the first teachers of their children in their lifelong journey of faith. To be good teachers, couples also need to focus on their own formation and faith development. We are fortunate indeed that, through the Teams Movement, we can experience both teaching and learning. Love is our education. It sustains us and teaches us. Teams provides us with the opportunity to hear our different stories of love and how our journeys, supported by God's loving presence, have shaped us as couples.

Reflection is an essential element of our growth in Christ. As we reflect over what we have learnt and as we ponder these things in our hearts, we, like Mary, come to recognise a loving, compassionate and ever-present God in our lives.

The Word of God

God's Word provides spiritual education where we learn of God's love and faithfulness to us. When God speaks, there is an intention, an insight and a revelation. When we are open to God's word through reflection and prayer, it produces much 'fruit.' As we reflect on this Scripture, we might ask ourselves how God has spoken to us recently.

So the word that goes from my mouth does not return to me empty, without carrying out my will and succeeding in what it was sent to do. (Isaiah 55:11)

As he grew in wisdom, Jesus would have experienced Mary's unwavering trust in God and her insights about God's faithfulness. This was important formation to prepare him for his mission on earth. It was an especially meaningful moment for both Mary and Jesus when he was found teaching in the temple as a 12-year-old boy. Here we catch a glimpse that there was something very special about this young boy who was educating those who were regarded as 'learned'.

After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, 'Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.' 'Why were you searching for me?' he asked. 'Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?' But they did not understand what he was saying to them. (Luke 2:46–50)

The experience of a Teams member

Education has emerged as a wonderful gift in our story. Without this gift, we would have lost both of our sons within a short period of time. I am unsure how I would have coped given the severity of those days. However, one thing I know: my relationship with Mary grew closer and stronger.

There is not much that I haven't shared with her on a daily basis, and I implored her, in desperation, to help my boys to live.

Our journey as a family has been far from easy. One son was diagnosed with cancer at the age of 20 and another son suffered a stroke at the age of 16. Both were life-defining events. As parents, we all pray to God that our children will experience good health. I recall praying for this all of their lives but at the time of the medical diagnoses, I also prayed for the strength to be there for my sick children. Suddenly I could understand Mary much more. To see her son during his crucifixion was unbearable, yet she had to trust that God would prevail in this traumatic event. My husband and I had to do the same. In the case of our eldest son, his chemotherapy and radiotherapy was intense: seven months of treatment that disfigured a beautiful young man in his prime. With hair loss and a gaunt body, we entrusted our son to the care of God and to Mary as many people prayed for us. It was a journey into the unknown and often took us to dark places. Teams was crucial for us as a couple. The members of our Team stayed in touch when circumstances took over and hospital stays were required. They dropped off food, kept in touch and offered a shoulder to cry on. I now understand how important these things would have been to Mary as well. In those days, I handed over the health of my eldest son to God and to Mary, praying that he would be cured. Our prayers were answered as he has now been 15 years cancer-free.

However, we were unable to predict a more serious family crisis. In 2013, our youngest son, aged 16 and 3 months, experienced a life-threatening brain bleed that resulted in a stroke. When he presented himself to us at one o'clock in the morning, I knew intuitively that he was having a serious medical episode. During my call to the ambulance service, I cried out to God to save him. As it happened, everyone who saved his life was available when we needed them, from ambulance officers who recognised his symptoms at home, to the gifted neurosurgeon who operated on his injured brain, to the selfless staff in the Intensive Care Unit who monitored his recovery.

Our son's struggle to regain some of his mobility was not without its dark periods of despair. Yet again, both my husband and I were supported by family, friends and concerned strangers with prayers and acts of kindness. Our Team was a constant in a world of change. I am grateful that we joined Teams in 2000 for the members have been our strength through their prayers and care.

Today, our son is 24 years old and is our gift; we no longer take life and health for granted but give thanks to God for the second chance for the re-birthing of both our sons.

My husband and I are very grateful. There are people who have dedicated their entire lives to improving health by using their God-given gifts to help others. There is so much more we need to discover through education and the future promises huge strides in the field of medical cures. God has gifted us to learn and we marvel about how much we already know. But it doesn't stop with what we are already doing. We must continue to develop education so that all can access it and benefit from the good that comes from it. The gift of education saved two of my children. May it continue to inspire people to improve lives. We pray that education will be used for good purposes, just as God intended.

More food for thought

Pope Francis

Pope Francis speaks clearly about the importance of having a balance of education in a child's development. It should include moral, spiritual and social aspects of life. He goes on to discuss the importance of education in lifting people out of poverty so they can shape their own future. He speaks, too, of subsidiarity, a key principle that requires decisions to be made by the people closest and most affected by the issues and concerns of the community.

I think first of families, called to a primary and vital mission of education. Families are the first place where the values of love and fraternity, togetherness and sharing, concern and care for others are lived out and handed on. They are also the privileged milieu for transmitting the faith, beginning with those first simple gestures of devotion which mothers teach their children. Teachers, who have the challenging task of training children and youth in schools or other settings, should be conscious that their responsibility extends also to the moral, spiritual and social aspects of life. The values of freedom, mutual respect and solidarity can be handed on from a tender age. (*Fratelli Tutti*, 114)

It makes us realise that 'the scandal of poverty cannot be addressed by promoting strategies of containment that only tranquilise the poor and render them tame and inoffensive. How sad it is when we find, behind allegedly altruistic works, the other being reduced to passivity'. What are needed are new pathways of self-expression and participation in society. Education serves these by making it possible for each human being to shape his or her own future. Here too we see the importance of the principle of subsidiarity, which is inseparable from the principle of solidarity. (*Fratelli Tutti*, 187)

Read the message from Pope Francis at the meeting organised by the Congregation for Catholic Education: 'Global Compact on Education. Together to look beyond' (October 2020). This link is to the English text of the Pope's talk. The video is available in Italian.

https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20201015_videomessaggio-global-compact.html

Or watch <https://thepopevideo.org/families-schools-of-human-development/>

Fr Caffarel

In his book, *Love and Grace in Marriage*, Fr Caffarel explores the importance of Christian love in our education. True love requires a collaboration with God. We cannot do it on our own.

The source of Christian love is not in the heart of man. It is in God. To spouses who wish to love, who wish to learn to love more and more, there is only one good counsel: seek God, love God, be united with God, put Him in first place. Whoever separates himself from God, loses love. On the other hand, this love grows in the measure that love for God grows. (*Love and Grace in Marriage*, pp. 5–6)

Mary cooperated fully with God in this love and brought forth God's Son. Her role to raise him and guide him was a total selfless act of love. Mary grew in her understanding of Jesus and his mission as she pondered the mysteries revealed to her and accompanied Jesus through the events of his life.

Fr Caffarel speaks about the importance of parents as the first teachers, and he challenges us to consider how effectively we love our children:

He who loves God the most is not he who cries 'Lord, Lord ...,' but he who does His will and collaborates in His work. For God has done men the honour of willing to need their assistance: the earth will not bear its harvest without the labour of man, the child will not become an adult without education. But without competence, workers and parents are poor collaborators. (*Love and Grace in Marriage*, pp. 99–100)

For to love a child is not to pamper him and provide for him; it is to understand him and to bring his personality to its own fulfillment. For Christian parents, it is not only loving their children which is necessary but loving them in a Christian way. And this is something other than teaching them some virtues, some religious practices, and a precocious sweet piety. Christian parents must understand and help their children to understand the call of Christ to them. (*Love and Grace in Marriage*, p. 30)

Questions for the Sit Down

- ❖ Can you name a particular educational gift in your spouse?
- ❖ Who are the people who have most influenced your spiritual growth?



The Team Meeting

Questions for discussion

- ❖ Who are the people who have most influenced your spiritual growth?
- ❖ How has Teams helped you to grow in your marriage and spiritual life?
- ❖ What challenges have you encountered in educating your children in the Catholic faith?
- ❖ Why do some people not have access to education in your country?

We pray together

Song: Hail Mary, Gentle Woman

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OUey6ytEXqY>

Hail Mary, full of grace
The Lord is with you.
Blessed are you among women
And blest is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God,
Pray for us sinners now,
And at the hour of death. Amen

Refrain

Gentle woman, quiet light,
Morning star, so strong and bright,
Gentle Mother, peaceful dove,
Teach us wisdom, teach us love.

You were chosen by the Father,
You were chosen for the Son.
You were chosen from all women,
And for woman, shining one. **Refrain**

Blessed are you among women,
Blest in turn all women too
Blessed they with peaceful spirits.
Blessed they with gentle hearts. **Refrain**

Text: Based on Luke 1:28, 42. Text and music © 1975, 1978, Carey Landry. Published by OCP. All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission under ONE LICENSE, License #A-741481. All rights reserved.

Reading

Read and reflect on the Word of God passage provided prior to the meeting: Luke 2:46–50

A Prayer for Educators, Parents, and Students

Loving and Compassionate God,
We come before you as parents and educators of our children.
We are often faced with challenges as we make decisions that require your wisdom, understanding and insight.
When we feel overwhelmed and uncertain, be present in our lives.
Strengthen us from within,
so that we might be a source of strength, confidence, and hope for our children.
May they grow in grace and wisdom.
In areas where there is a lack,
provide them with knowledge, understanding, counsel, and fortitude.
We ask all these things, through the intercession of our Mother Mary,
and through Christ our teacher. Amen.

Sharing on the Endeavours

Share a little about your own life's journey in the context of the Endeavours.

Final Prayer

Choose one of the following:

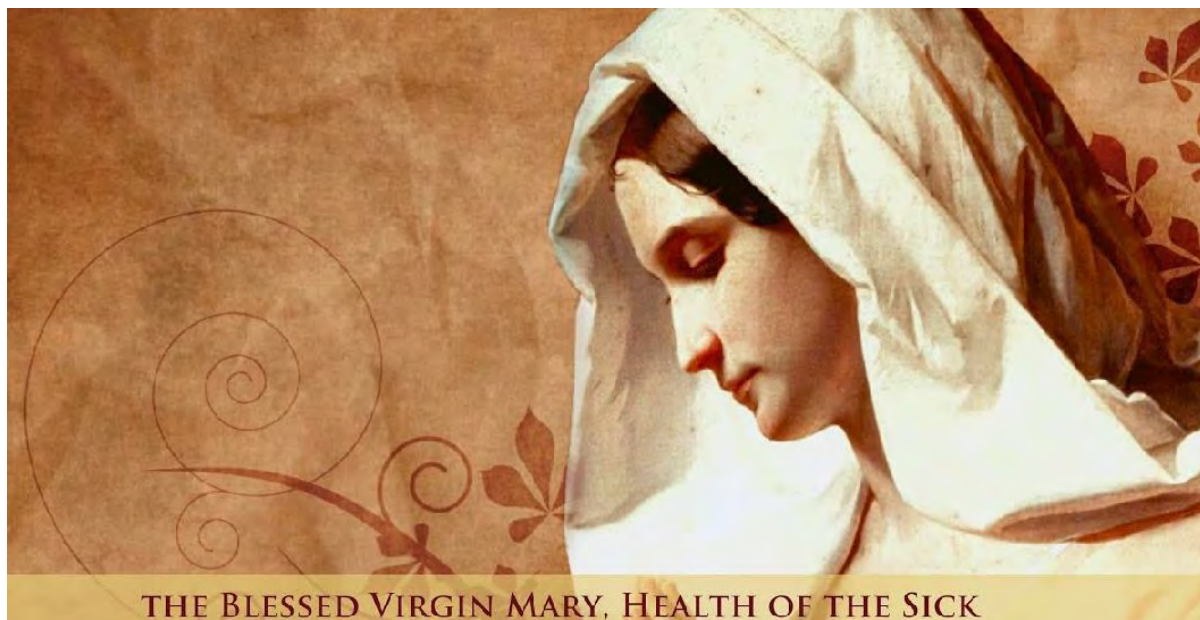
- ❖ Prayer for the Beatification of Father Caffarel
- ❖ Magnificat

See 'Prayers for the Meetings' at the end of this document.



Meeting 3

They are no longer healthy



Mother of mercy, Health of the sick, refuge of sinners, Comforter of the afflicted, you know my wants, my troubles, my sufferings; look with mercy on me. (Inscription in Our Lady of Lourdes chapel, at the Basilica in Lourdes)

Objectives

The aim of this meeting is to give each Team member the opportunity to:

- ❖ Recognise that the need to nurture our health in body, mind and spirit is an important part of our religious heritage.
- ❖ Recall how Mary lived her life, guided by her Jewish heritage as a framework to support her physical and spiritual needs.
- ❖ Become aware of health inequalities that must be addressed in our world.

Before the Meeting

Introduction

When we speak of being 'healthy', we usually think about our physical health. However, living a healthy life entails much more than this. To be healthy we need to consider our body, our mind and our spiritual life. We need to give attention to our health in order to live a full life and have a close relationship with God and our partners as well as with family and friends. We need to strive for a healthy world, a world gifted to us by God.

There is growing concern today that our world has lost its connection with the health of body, mind, and spirit. We tend to compartmentalise them and believe we can attend to them separately. Despite the riches of our modern world, health problems due to malnutrition or lack of access to health care abound. Mental health problems are also common, as is a lack of care for the elderly and disabled, and even for the health of our planet.

Concern for health has always been part of the human condition. Throughout the centuries, people have turned to God to ask for healing. Catholics have prayed through the intercession of Mary to gain help and solace for their health related problems. Shrines, such as Lourdes and Fatima, are visited by many thousands of people each year, signs of Mary's continuing association with the health of the people of the world.

Mary and Joseph would have been raised as children in accordance with Jewish religion and culture. Their faith had a holistic approach to life, and they were given instructions on how to live their life faithful to God's law. For example, the book of Leviticus contains instructions about all aspects of life: washing and cleanliness, treatment of particular ailments, the types of food that could be consumed, and how to support the poor and the disabled.

Mary gave birth to Jesus during a period of significant change. Like us today, you could say that they were living in what Pope Francis calls a change of era, and not just an era of change. Much of their world was under Roman occupation, and the traditional structures of Jewish society were under pressure from Roman culture. In response, Jewish community leaders (such as the Pharisees) continued to advocate strict observance of the law, even if some of these observances had by then become largely symbolic. It would have been a challenging time for Jewish families, torn between cultures.

In his ministry, Jesus saw the need to rebalance the observance of the law, to return to a more holistic approach. His teaching was filled with imagery of body, mind and spirit: 'I am the bread of life' (John 6:35). His message is life-giving rather than burdensome: 'I have come that you may have life and have it to the full' (John 10:10). In his miracles, Jesus showed that it was not enough to heal the physical ailments. It was just as important to restore the person to wholeness and to a healthy relationship with God. In the story of the healing of the paralytic, Jesus asks, 'Which is easier to say to the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven" or to say "Rise, take up your mat and walk?"' (Mark 2:9).

Married couples today also need to make difficult decisions in a changing world filled with inequalities:

- ❖ Where health is influenced more by economics and geo-political decisions than by the needs of the community.
- ❖ Where enough food is produced by the world's nations to feed everyone, but many people still starve.
- ❖ Where access to health education and access to vaccines are determined not by need but by a country's ability to pay for them.
- ❖ Where mental health issues are often hidden from the community and lack treatment.

As we consider the health needs in our own lives, we have no better model than Mary. In complete trust, she opened herself to God's word—body, mind and spirit. And so she was

able to say: 'My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit exults in God, my Saviour'.

The Word of God

Throughout his ministry, Jesus goes to the place where the 'sick' are to be found. He does not shun the reality of their situation. Instead, he sees beyond external appearances and public perceptions to discover the hidden potential of the 'healed' person.

While he was at table in the house it happened that a number of tax collectors and sinners came to sit at the table with Jesus and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, 'Why does your master eat with tax collectors and sinners?' When he heard this he replied, 'It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick. Go and learn the meaning of the words: Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice. And indeed I came to call not the upright, but sinners.' (Matthew 9:10–13)

We see in Jesus a beautiful tension: one who mercifully spent time with sinners and loved them, calling them out of their sin and spiritual sickness and offering them healing and forgiveness. May we be challenged by Jesus' example. He was both loving and holy, never pitting these two ideas against each other. We would do well to heed Jesus' advice to 'Go and learn the meaning of the words: Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice'.

The experience of a Team member

I was diagnosed with breast cancer in March. This was followed by surgery, chemo and radium lasting eight months. Then, the day after I went for my first three monthly check up, my husband, Greg, was diagnosed with acute myeloid leukaemia. This put our family back on the merry-go-round starting with chemo, a bone marrow transplant and dealing with the multitude of complications due to a depressed immune system. Initially the diagnosis put us into a state of shock but then our stoic family background kicked in.

Greg and I had a unique experience. In less than 12 months we had both been diagnosed with cancer, and therefore both became a patient and a carer, and I believe I speak for both of us when I say that as a patient, you are calm and focused, in control, but as a carer, you feel helpless, unable to cure or help with the pain, totally out of control. However, as both patient and carer we were able to truly support and understand each other, consequently providing the one thing necessary for all life—hope.

Greg's spirituality increased in the 11 ½ months of his illness. During this time, he found comfort in some of the practices he grew up with such as the Rosary and Novenas. We both dealt with the situation by turning to our faith, asking the Holy Spirit for help, and this was answered by our being given the strength to cope.

But, in a situation such as Greg's and mine, we could not do it alone. Our Team has constantly supported us and continues to be there for me on my journey. As a Team we have faced many battles together. And I can only hope that I have also provided the love, support and friendship that they have given to me in my time of need.

Greg passed away in February, less than two years after my diagnosis.

Today, I have my health, my children and grandchildren and my world is flowing beautifully. And because of the love that we shared I have been able to move through the physical loss of Greg and to become even more consciously aware of love, family and friends, even more grateful for my faith and more appreciative of my existence. The greatest gift was to have Greg with me for 26 years and now I have him looking over me for the rest of my life.

More food for thought

Pope Francis

Pope Francis makes it clear that health inequalities must be addressed in our modern world:

Often, as we carry on our semantic or ideological disputes, we allow our brothers and sisters to die of hunger and thirst, without shelter or access to health care.... These things are essential; they can no longer be deferred. (*Fratelli Tutti*, 189)

He also reminds us that we must return to our scriptural roots of health in body, mind and spirit:

The rich heritage of Christian spirituality, the fruit of twenty centuries of personal and communal experience, has a precious contribution to make to the renewal of humanity... Admittedly, Christians have not always appropriated and developed the spiritual treasures bestowed by God upon the Church, where the life of the spirit is not dissociated from the body or from nature or from worldly realities, but lived in and with them, in communion with all that surrounds us. (*Laudato Si'*, 216)

Pope Francis challenges us to look beyond ourselves. Showing compassion for the health and well-being of others is not just for their benefit. Instead, by caring for the welfare of others, we too become whole.

The sight of a person who is suffering disturbs us. It makes us uneasy, since we have no time to waste on other people's problems. These are symptoms of an unhealthy society. A society that seeks prosperity but turns its back on suffering. (*Fratelli Tutti*, 65)

In this video, Pope Francis praises the work of doctors and humanitarian workers in war-torn areas who risk their own lives to save the lives of others.

<https://thepopevideo.org/doctors-and-their-collaborators-in-war-torn-areas/> (57 seconds).

Henri Caffarel

Love those around you, make an effort to reach out to those with whom you are less spontaneously sympathetic. Ask yourself whether there are certain persons who are expecting, in vain, some material or moral help from you. (Fr Henri Caffarel, *Letter 25, Being Present to God*).

Those who nourish their faith, who seek to know God ... are preserved from spiritual anaemia. And because their faith is nourished, their love of God develops and their generosity in the service of God grows. (*L'Anneau d'Or*, February 1960, 'The Lord Looks Down')

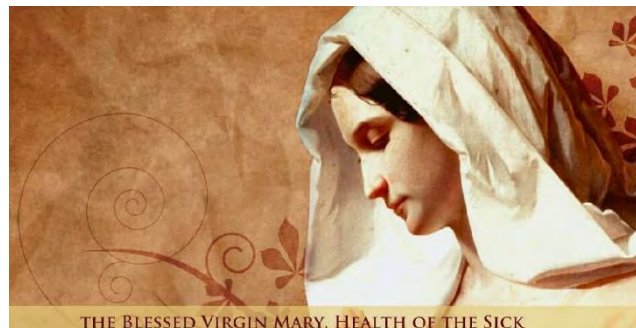
Bruce Turley

Bruce Turley describes how the way of life proposed by Christian communities like Teams can lead us to 'personal wholeness'.

Health is partly influenced by our way of life. The increasing attention to diet, exercise, avoidance of smoking and moderation in alcohol consumption are obvious examples. More subtle, but no less significant, is the need for solitude and relationships, meditation or prayer and active community involvement. Christian Communities have unique opportunities to proclaim and demonstrate a way of life which contributes to personal wholeness. (Bruce Turley, *Turning Points*, pp. 46–47)

Question for the Sit Down

- ❖ Recall a health crisis in your life or someone close to you.
- ❖ What questions did it raise for you?
- ❖ Did your outlook on life change as a result of this experience?



The Team Meeting

Questions for discussion

- ❖ What came out of your discussion during the Sit Down?
- ❖ How easy do you find it to turn to God in times of a health crisis?
- ❖ Do you think about your own health in terms of body, mind and spirit?
- ❖ How comfortable are we about sitting with people who are like 'tax collectors and sinners' needing our support?
- ❖ Discuss examples of health inequalities in your own locality.

We pray together

Opening Prayer

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful
and enkindle in them the fire of your love.
Send forth your Spirit and renew the face of the earth.
O God, by the light of the Holy Spirit,
teach the hearts of the faithful
and grant that by the same Spirit we may be truly wise
and ever enjoy his consolation. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

- The opening prayer of a St Vincent de Paul Conference Meeting.

Meditation

Read and reflect on the Word of God passage provided prior to the meeting: Matthew 9:10–13

Sharing on the Endeavours

Share a little about your own life's journey in the context of the Rule of Life Endeavour, or any other Endeavour that suits the Team at this time.

Prayer

The entire created world belongs to you, God,
the physical world with the elements,
the world that contains life, feelings, and thoughts,
the invisible world of spirit in which we open ourselves to
you.
Heal the nature, the creatures of the earth and humankind,
and make this world whole.
You breathe life into the world and unite all creatures and
humankind in one breath,
So that we live, and move, and have our being in you. Amen.



Hymn: We Are Many Parts (Marty Haugen)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u8oWliE75mI>

We are many parts
We are all one body.
And the gifts we have,
We are given to share.
May the spirit of love, make us one indeed;
One, the Love that we share;
One, our hope in despair;
One, the cross that we bear.

God of all, we look to you,
We would be your servants true,
Let us be your love to all the world.

We are many parts
We are all one body.
And the gifts we have,
We are given to share.
May the spirit of love, make us one indeed;
One, the Love that we share;
One, the hope in despair;
One, the cross that we bear.

So my pain is pain for you
In your joy, is my joy too,
All is brought together in the Lord.

We are many parts
We are all one body.
And the gifts we have,
We are given to share.
May the spirit of love, make us one indeed;
One, the Love that we share;
One, our hope in despair;
One, the cross that we bear.

Text: 1 Corinthians 12, 13; Marty Haugen, b.1950, © 1980, 1986, GIA Publications, Inc. All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission under ONE LICENSE, License #A-741481. All rights reserved.

Final Prayer

Choose one of the following:

- ❖ Prayer for the Beatification of Father Caffarel
- ❖ Magnificat

See 'Prayers for the Meetings' at the end of this document.



Meeting 4

They have no home



Objectives

The aim of this meeting is to give each Team member the opportunity to:

- ❖ Grow in awareness of the causes of homelessness, locally and globally.
- ❖ Learn how my actions can contribute to others having no home
- ❖ Be inspired by Mary to say 'Yes' to my own invitation from God

Before the Meeting

Introduction

To those of us who have a safe home it may be difficult to imagine why other people do not have one. In this chapter we will discover some of the reasons for being without a home, wherever we are in the world. About two per cent of the world's population—about 150 million people—are homeless.

The causes and consequences of homelessness are complex and increasing. What is your image of a homeless person?

If you are in an economically advantaged country: does the image of a man sitting in the street of a large city come to your mind? You may be surprised to learn that there are similar numbers of women—young and old, babies and other children who do not have safe adequate shelter.

Due to climate damage our polar ice caps are melting and sea levels are rising, causing the destruction of island nations including most Pacific Islands as well as low-lying countries, for example, Bangladesh, Miami and Hawaii in the USA. Climate damage and natural disasters are destroying communities and threaten us all.

Intergenerational trauma of First Nations people in colonised countries causes homelessness. In Australia our aboriginal people form about three per cent of our population but 20 per cent of homeless people.

Mental illness and physical limitations can contribute to people being rejected by family, friends and employers. People can move in and out of inadequate housing and homelessness. The trauma of violence, feeling unsafe, lack of shelter and inadequate support for illness can lead to dependence on alcohol and other drugs. This perpetuates the cycle of homelessness.

We can follow the examples of Jesus and Mary by responding to people who are our neighbours. Mary allowed the possibility of her own homelessness when she accepted becoming the mother of Jesus. As a young betrothed pregnant woman she courageously placed herself in a perilous position in her community. Mary did, indeed, find herself without a home when about to give birth to Jesus. The young family then had to flee to Egypt, becoming refugees.

The Word of God

While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. (Luke 2:6–7)

Mary, Joseph and Jesus became homeless when Caesar Augustus decreed that all had to return to their place of birth for a census. This is not how the arrival of the Messiah would have been anticipated by the religious leaders of the time. We are reminded again that God's ways are not our ways. The least was to become the greatest.

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbour?' Jesus replied, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?' He said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise'. (Luke 10:28–37)

The experience of a Teams Couple

In 2019 we heard about a new initiative in Bendigo. It was to initiate a Winter Night Shelter for the homeless. The concept had started in the United Kingdom by Christian Churches in cooperation with local communities.

It was to run for 92 nights from June 1 to August 31 using church facilities. The theme was to provide food, shelter and dignity. Currently the program is in its fifth year.

Becoming involved meant becoming travelling companions with homeless people, hearing their stories, actively listening, serving and sharing meals. However, we were also travelling companions with other volunteers.

In many ways we were blessed ourselves. It helped us realize how much God had given us: love, forgiveness, family and abundant blessings.

We also learnt how unresolved traumas impact peoples' lives. One or two traumas can lead to homelessness, mental health issues, addictions and much more.

We were drawn into the lives of our guests and their experiences. As guests developed a sense of hope, some transitioned into some form of accommodation and some chose to seek help. They developed a sense of community together.

We were enriched by the ecumenical group that evolved and humbled by the generosity of people who believed in the program: cooking meals, donating funds, grants, practical supplies, gifts and more.

More food for thought

Pope Francis

With reference to St Francis of Assisi, Pope Francis tells us 'Wherever he went, he sowed seeds of peace and walked alongside the poor, the abandoned, the infirm and the outcast, the least of his brothers and sisters' (*Frattelli Tutti*, 1 & 2).

Yet today's world is largely a deaf world...At times, the frantic pace of the modern world prevents us from listening attentively to what another person is saying. (*Frattelli Tutti*, 48)

In the story of the stranger on the road (Luke 10:25–37), we are challenged by Pope Francis:

Which of these persons do you identify with?... We need to acknowledge that we are constantly tempted to ignore others, especially the weak. Let us admit that, for all the progress we have made, we are still 'illiterate' when it comes to accompanying, caring for and supporting the most frail and vulnerable members of our developed societies. We have become accustomed to looking the other way, passing by, ignoring situations until they affect us directly. (*Frattelli Tutti*, 64)

There are many ways to pass by at a safe distance: We can retreat inwards, ignore others, or be indifferent to their plight. Or simply look elsewhere, as in some countries, or certain sectors of them, where contempt is shown for the poor and their culture, and one looks the other way, as if a development plan

imported from without could edge them out. This is how some justify their indifference: the poor, whose pleas for help might touch their hearts, simply do not exist. The poor are beyond the scope of their interest. (*Fratelli Tutti*, 73)

Fr Caffarel

This sick person, this poor man, this abandoned woman who asked for your help, do you discern in their call the unmistakable sound of the voice of Christ? (*L'Anneau* Editorial, 'Are You Believers?' END December 1956)

Question for the Sit Down

When have we turned away from people who have no home?



The Team Meeting

Meditation

You are invited to gaze silently on this image. You might like to play some quiet music in the background or just enjoy the silence for a couple of minutes.

This painting by Italian artist Roberto Ferruzzi is a portrait of an 11-year-old girl holding her baby brother. He never intended the painting to be one of the Virgin Mary. But since the girl looked like a little Madonna, he called the painting *Madonnina* (Little Madonna). Eventually it came to be known as *Madonna della Strada* (Madonna of the Street).



According to the former Archbishop of New York, Cardinal O'Connor, Ferruzzi is said to have painted a diptych—a painting with two sides. The other painting depicts a woman of the streets, a prostitute, who has been frantically rushing around the streets of her little Italian town with a new-born baby, not knowing what to do. Turning a corner, she meets the Virgin Mother carrying her baby, Jesus. It is for that reason that the painting is depicted on the medal worn by the Sisters of Life that Cardinal O'Connor founded in 1991 to work with vulnerable women.

Let us reflect on all women who have been forced into prostitution to financially support themselves and their children. We pray for an end to family violence, war, prejudice, poverty, land damage, mental illness and other causes of homelessness.

Mary's Song: based on Luke 1:46–57

Magnify your goodness, O Holy One, through us,
as through Mary,
simple peasant woman,
your goodness was made known.
Lift all that is downtrodden,
within us, and all around the world,
to a glorious hope.
Shake the dust of broken dreams
and dead-end futures
from the cloth of our lives, and crown us with
righteousness, that we might be your people.





Bless us,
nurture the holy seed
growing within us,
that we might come to believe
the unlikely story
the angels told to Mary:
the life of God is about to be born-in us.

Our souls magnify you;
our songs glorify you;
our prayer is a holy longing;
our life is a 'yes' to your invitation to mother-
forth your sacred future. Amen

- If Darwin Prayed: Prayers for Evolutionary Mystics (Bruce Sanguin ©2010. Used with permission)



Questions for discussion

- ❖ Please click on this link to watch a 4-minute video. After, take some time to reflect silently.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X0gA2mxbjSY>
What surprised you in this video clip?
- ❖ How do you respond when you see someone without a safe place to live?
- ❖ What do you see in this image of the sculpture by Timothy P Schmalz?
- ❖ How could I respond differently to people near where I live who have no home?



We pray together

Leader 1: Creator God, uncover compassion in our hearts.
God who is Creation, hear us.

All: Creator God, hear our prayer.

Leader 2: Lord Jesus, challenge those in our governments to create safe homes.
Lord, hear us.

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

Leader 3: Holy Spirit, remind me to treat every person I meet with dignity,
regardless of the temptation to judge them as less worthy.
Spirit, hear us.

All: Spirit, hear our prayer.

Leader 4: Like Mary, we seek to be clothed with the Word of God:
'If today you hear God's voice, harden not your heart.'

All: Clothe me with a shirt of compassion.

Leader 5: 'For I was hungry and you gave me food,
I was thirsty and you gave me a drink.'

All: Clothe me with gloves of hospitality.

Leader 1: 'I was a stranger and you welcomed me'.

All: Clothe my arms with sleeves of openness.

Leader 2: 'I was naked and you gave me clothing.'

All: Clothe me with a coat of generosity.

Leader 3: 'I was sick and you took care of me.'

All: Clothe me with acceptance.

Leader 4: 'I was in prison and you visited me.'

All: Clothe me with shoes of self-sacrifice.

Leader 5: 'In everything do to others as you would have them do to you'
Clothe me with love for my neighbour.

All: Like Mary, Clothe us with the Word of God.

Sharing on the Endeavours

Share a little about your own life's journey in the context of the Endeavours, or in the context of the particular Endeavour chosen by the Team for this month.

Prayer for homeless people

Hear our prayer today for all women and men, boys and girls who are homeless this day.
For those sleeping under bridges, on park benches, in doorways or bus stations.
For those who can only find shelter for the night but must wander in the daytime.
For families broken because they could not afford to pay the rent.
For those who have no relatives or friends who can take them in.
For those who have no place to keep possessions that remind them who they are.
For those who are afraid and without hope.
For those who have been betrayed by our social safety net.
For all these people, we pray that you will provide shelter, security and hope.

We pray for those of us with warm houses and comfortable beds
that we are not lulled into complacency and forgetfulness.
Jesus, help us to see your face in the eyes of every homeless person we meet.
Empower us to work for justice and peace through words and deeds,
and through the political means we have.
Give us open hearts to greet and meet the homeless people in our neighbourhoods.
In your name we pray. Amen

Final Prayer

Let us sing together: The Magnificat (Mary's Song)

<https://peterkearney.bandcamp.com/track/14-the-magnificat-marys-song>

CHORUS: My soul is praising the Lord, yes!
And glad for all He is saving.
Because the Lord has remembered me
Small as I am, poor as I am
All people will call me blessed.

For He that is mighty has done me great things.
Holy His name. Holy His name.
His mercy is reaching from age to age.
Holy His name. Holy His name
To all those who honour Him. CHORUS

For He that is mighty has stretched out His hand.
Scattered the proud, shattered their plans.
He's pulled down the princes from their golden thrones.
Scattered the proud, shattered their plans.
He has raised to their place the poor. CHORUS

He's filled up the hungry with many good things.
Earth is renewed. All things renewed.
But the rich, he has sent them all empty away.
Earth is renewed. All things renewed.
He has kept now the promise He made. CHORUS

- Based on Luke 1:46–55. Adapted and set to music by Peter Kearney. Used with permission. Peter regularly posts his songs online: To subscribe, visit: peterkearneysongs.com.au/home



Meeting 5

They no longer have a country



Objectives

The aim of this meeting is to give each Team member the opportunity to:

- ❖ Reflect on the example of Mary and Joseph in hearing God's word, trusting God's word, and acting on it.
- ❖ Understand better God's plan that all human beings are sisters and brothers.
- ❖ Examine ways in which, as individuals and Team members, 'clothed in the word of God', we may be 'A Heart Open to the Whole World' (*Fratelli Tutti*, Chapter 4).

Before the Meeting

Introduction

In the first journey of his pontificate, Pope Francis travelled by boat to the island of Lampedusa, the closest land for many fleeing North Africa. Appalled by the number of people who had died on the journey, he dropped a wreath in the sea to honour those who had perished, visited the people who were detained on the island, and led a penitential service on an altar made of the wood from wrecked boats.

For Pope Francis, the boats were a symbol of a lack of justice and compassion in national and international life. The problem was not just of people smugglers or of protecting borders; it was a problem of not valuing people properly.

How should we as Christians respond to people who seek protection from violence and persecution? In answering this question we are guided by Scripture and the social teaching of the Church.

Early in the Hebrew Bible, the respect and care owing to the stranger is established. In the Book of Leviticus we find the following exhortation:

When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God. (Leviticus 19:33–34)

The Law called on citizens to show compassion and solidarity towards the stranger.

In the infancy narrative of Matthew's Gospel, the first days of the child's life are characterised by the wise men's adoration of his majesty and, immediately afterwards, the escape of the family of Jesus from Herod's slaughter.

What trauma must this have caused the family? To be uprooted, to flee with only the few things they could carry. Did they even have a donkey to help carry their meagre belongings or to support the mother and baby? Where did they find shelter? Desert nights are cold and the days hot. Did anyone along the way offer them water or food or shelter? We don't know if they travelled alone or in a small group, but they certainly could not have remained in contact with families at home. Of what we can be sure, however, is that, throughout their journey, Mary would have held on tightly to Jesus. In our lives, too, we can follow Mary's example, and hold tightly to Jesus in all we encounter in our lives.

Mary and Joseph accepted and trusted God's word and took the child to safety, despite all the difficulties they encountered, despite not knowing what they would find along the way, or where they would end up, or how long it would be before they could return. If we are to follow Mary's example, we too must be prepared to trust God's word, and to go outside our 'comfort zone', to do what we know to be right.

These parents, this mother and father so accepting of God's word, must have instilled in their son a great compassion for others, even if it meant acting in a unconventional way. We are familiar with the stories In the Gospel of Mark (5:21–24; 35–43) of Jesus curing the woman

who had been 12 years with a haemorrhage, and returning to life the daughter of Jairus. Jesus reaches out to those on the margins of his society. The haemorrhaging woman was ritually 'unclean' and unable to participate in the normal activities of her society. But Jesus did not avoid her; he healed her. Again, taking the hand of the dead daughter of Jairus would have been viewed as inappropriate and unclean. Jesus, however, showed he was not afraid to step outside boundaries to help others. In both these events, Jesus 'reached out his hand'. As we are Jesus' hands on earth now, so too should we reach out our hand to those in pain and distress.

Pope Francis tells us that the ideal of the New Jerusalem (Revelations 21:3) is:

where all peoples are united in peace and harmony, celebrating the goodness of God and the wonders of creation. To achieve this ideal, however, we must make every effort to break down the walls that separate us and, in acknowledging our profound interconnection, build bridges that foster a culture of encounter. Today's migration movements offer an opportunity for us to overcome our fears and let ourselves be enriched by the diversity of each person's gifts. Then, if we so desire, we can transform borders into privileged places of encounter, where the miracle of an ever wider 'we' can come about. (*Message for the 107th World Day of Migrants and Refugees*, 2021)

The Word of God

Reflect on the reading below. Pause for a few moments and imagine Mary's troubled heart as she fled to Egypt to protect her child, fleeing through the night, perhaps fearing being overtaken by soldiers looking for them. She would hear news of the fate of the babies who could not escape Herod's wrath. As she heard in her head the words of Jeremiah and the crying of Rachel for her children, where did she find her strength? She held tightly to Jesus, not just as a loving and protective mother, but knowing and trusting that this was God's plan for her, the one to which she had said 'yes'.

Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him'. Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, 'Out of Egypt I have called my son'.

When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men he was infuriated, and he gave orders to kill all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. This was to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: 'A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; She refused to be consoled, because they are no more.' (Matthew 2:13–18)

The experience of a Teams couple

We first became aware of the possibility of direct support for asylum-seeking men in off-shore detention through our parish social justice group. We had heard about a Brigidine nun who was organising groups of people wanting to ensure that these men had some church or community group to support them. Over several years we contributed to food parcels, clothing parcels, phone credit and messages of support. One Christmas, one of our group gained permission to visit the detention centre. We baked parcels of homemade biscuits and our parish craft group provided small gifts and handmade cards with messages of support.

Suffering from severe physical and mental health issues, a number of the men were eventually released on bridging visas, with no support provided; they were expected to find housing and work in a time of severe Covid shut-down. Our parish group issued an invitation for one or two of them to move to our local area. We welcomed one of them (whom we shall call 'N') in October 2020. With assistance from local agencies, we supported him in getting assistance for his medical conditions, in finding housing, training and work, and by helping him get his driving licence. We have become friends with him, and he loves the interaction with the families who are supporting him.

We have been so humbled by the gracious and heartfelt thanks we constantly receive from N. His enthusiasm to learn and try to build a life here despite what has happened overwhelms us. We only wish we could help to provide more security for his future as he must find a third country to accept him permanently. He recently spoke at each of the Sunday Masses in our parish. With tears in his eyes, and a shaky voice, he thanked those who had sent messages of support and material goods to those in detention. 'You gave us hope when no-one seemed to care about us.'

More food for thought

Pope Francis

In his statement at Lampedusa, Pope Francis called out to us: 'Has any one wept? Today has anyone wept in our world?' The texts further below reflect Pope Francis' deep concern for those who are displaced and fleeing persecution:

The dignity of our peoples demands safe corridors for migrants and refugees so they can move without fear from deadly areas to safer ones. It is unacceptable to deter immigration by letting hundreds of migrants die in perilous sea crossings or desert treks. The Lord will ask us to account for each one of those deaths. (*Let us Dream*, p. 114)

I ask God 'to prepare our hearts to encounter our brothers and sisters, so that we may overcome our differences rooted in political thinking, language, culture and religion. Let us ask him to anoint our whole being with the balm of his mercy, which heals the injuries caused by mistakes, misunderstandings and disputes. And let us ask him for the grace to send us forth, in humility and meekness, along the demanding but enriching path of seeking peace'. (*Fratelli Tutti*, 254)

In our day, the Church is called to go out into the streets of every existential periphery in order to heal wounds and to seek out the straying, without prejudice or fear, without proselytising, but ready to widen her tent to embrace everyone. Among those dwelling in those existential peripheries, we find many migrants and refugees, displaced person and victims of trafficking, to whom the Lord wants his love to be manifested and his salvation preached. (*Address to the National Directors of Pastoral Care for Migrants*, 22 September 2017)

Every stranger who knocks at our door is an opportunity for an encounter with Jesus Christ, who identifies with the welcomed and rejected strangers of every age (Matthew 25:35–43). (*Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 104th World Day of Migrants and Refugees* 2018)

Fr Caffarel

The following texts reflect Father Caffarel's perspective about reaching out to strangers and the love we need to show to each other:

You are expected: We cannot help feeling forlorn when we arrive in a strange city (at the docks, the railroad or bus station, the airport) and know that nobody is there waiting for us. By contrast, if we are greeted by a cheerful face, if others reach out to help us, we have a wonderful sense of consolation. We are delivered from the cruel impression that somehow we have lost our way, that we are completely astray. The strangeness does not matter anymore – the customs, the language, the vast disconcerting city. It is not so hard to be a stranger to everybody else, providing there is one person who thinks of us as a friend. (*Being Present to God: Letters on Prayer*, trans. Angeline Bouchard.)

The following quotations come from 'Radioscopie', a radio broadcast by Jacques Chancel with Father Caffarel, 15 March 1973):

And all my preoccupations, all my pains were to teach—to teach isn't the right word—to help people to discover that human love is a way toward God. But then we must be aware of the type of love we are dealing with, we have to place milestones along the way, we have to help people to proceed on that road! This is my deep belief: human love speaks of God's love, it is a kind of parable.

It is because God defined Himself or rather St John defined God: 'God is Love' and Love is what the world is made of!

Christ disarmed hatred with love, and I have seen astounding things, love being stronger than hatred, but God! How difficult that is!

Questions for the Sit Down

- ❖ What are our attitudes and approaches to welcoming strangers or the marginalised?
- ❖ How do these similarities or differences affect our marriage?



The Team Meeting

Questions for discussion

- ❖ Do I, like Mary, say 'yes' to God throughout my day, especially in the people I meet and the situations I encounter? How does it change my behaviour to be in 'yes mode'?
- ❖ In what ways do you consider yourself to be a good and welcoming neighbour? What specific qualities or characteristics make such a person?
- ❖ How do we respond to Pope Francis' call in Fratelli Tutti to welcome the stranger without counting the cost?
- ❖ Sometimes putting ourselves out on a limb for a cause may involve rejection from others. How do we handle that?

We pray together

Opening prayer

Heavenly Father,
We thank you for opening the hearts of many
to those who are fleeing for their lives.
Help us now to open our arms in welcome,
and reach out our hands in support,
that the desperate may find new hope,
and lives torn apart be restored.
We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ
who fled persecution at his birth
and at his last triumphed over death. Amen
Jesus, Mary loved you with fidelity and tenderness.
May we learn from her how to deepen our love for you.

Reading 1

The Holy Mother of God herself experienced the hardship of exile (Matthew 2:13–15), lovingly accompanied her Son's journey to Calvary, and now shares eternally his glory. To her maternal intercession we entrust the hope of all the world's migrants and refugees and the aspirations of the communities which welcome them, so that, responding to the Lord's supreme commandment, we may all learn to love the other, the stranger, as ourselves. (*Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 104th World Day of Migrants and Refugees*, 2018)

Hymn: Christ be our Light (Bernadette Farrell)

[Christ Be Our Light – Lux Terra Chapel Choir \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vLgTyWidlw\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vLgTyWidlw)

Longing for light, we wait in darkness.
Longing for truth, we turn to you.
Make us your own, your holy people,
light for the world to see.

Refrain

Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light!
Shine in your church gathered today.

Longing for peace, our world is troubled.
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has pow'r to save us.
Make us your living voice. **Refrain**

Longing for food, many are hungry.
Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us your bread, broken for others,
shared until all are fed. **Refrain**

Longing for shelter, many are homeless.
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us your building, sheltering others,
walls made of living stone. **Refrain**

Many the gifts, many the people,
many the hearts that yearn to belong
Let us be servants to one another,
making your kingdom come. **Refrain**

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Reading 2

Reflect on the Word of God passage provided prior to the meeting: Matthew 2:13–18, the flight of Mary and Joseph to Egypt.

Prayer

Leader: Mary, mother of the poor:

All: *Help us to hear the cry of God's people.*

Mary, refuge of the outcast:

- *Help us to welcome those rejected by the powerful in society.*

Mary, witness to faith:

- *Help us to enter fully into your Son's mission.*

Mary, woman of prayer:

- *Help us to receive God's word and act upon it.*

Mary, woman of sorrow:

- *Help us to walk with those who are afflicted and dying.*

Mary, mother of all peoples:

- *Help us to be sisters and brothers to one another.*

Sharing on the Endeavours

Share a little about your own life's journey in the context of the Endeavours.

Final prayer

Choose one of the following:

- ❖ Prayer for the Beatification of Father Caffarel
- ❖ Magnificat

See 'Prayers for the Meetings' at the end of this document.



Meeting 6

We can no longer do nothing – Care of Mother Earth



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Black Virgin of Le Puy

The aim of this meeting is to give each couple the opportunity to:

- ❖ Reflect on the responsibility of all people for the crisis facing the earth.
- ❖ Consider what it means as couples, in our families, Teams and communities, to be called to nurture rather than to dominate the earth.
- ❖ Discern whether the Teams movement's commitment to mutual respect and care provides us with a spirituality that can guide us in the journey of caring for our planet.

Before the Meeting

Introduction

Our movement is a powerful place for us to develop a spirituality of mutual care, concern and attentiveness. Can this spirituality of intimate concern give us a framework for a wider care of Mother Earth?

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis breaks open Genesis 1. He comments that the injunction to 'rule over the earth' has been misinterpreted as the right to exploit and destroy the natural world in order to benefit humanity. The benefits, of course, are transitory. Destroying the natural order rebounds on all of us and we all suffer the consequences. Reflecting on Genesis 2:15, 'God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it', the Pope says:

This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature. Each community can take from the bounty of the earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has the duty to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations. (*Laudato Si'*, 67)

Both Scripture and the Pope clearly command us to care for and protect this planet. We all have the right to food, clean water and shelter. Sadly, we are creating an ecological disaster, one that will impact most severely on the poorest and most vulnerable. In 2021, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warned us that human activities are changing the Earth's climate in unprecedented ways, with some of the changes now inevitable and irreversible.

Pope Francis speaks again:

Unless we recover the shared passion to create a community of belonging and solidarity worthy of our time, our energy and our resources, the global illusion that misled us will collapse and leave many in the grip of anguish and emptiness. Nor should we naively refuse to recognise that obsession with a consumerist lifestyle, above all when few people are capable of maintaining it, can only lead to violence and mutual destruction. (*Fratelli Tutti*, 36)

So we need to act. We might feel as if our lone efforts can achieve little. However, if we all act together, and change how we live in a myriad of small ways, we can make a difference. And we can hold those who represent us to account—by our votes and by our raised voices.

Pope Francis asks us to leave this planet, our home, in such a way that future generations can live safely and securely:

Thinking of those who will come after us does not serve electoral purposes, yet it is what authentic justice demands. As the Bishops of Portugal have taught, the earth 'is lent to each generation, to be handed on to the generation that follows'. (*Fratelli Tutti*, 178)

We could say that our Teams vocation 'to be protectors of God's handiwork...is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience' (*Laudato Si'*, 217). Mary can be our model in this. She accepted the responsibility to carry the infant Jesus, even at great cost

to herself. She loved and nurtured the child into the man. She followed him to the Cross and the Tomb and was there at Pentecost. Her love and steadfastness stand as our example.

Mary's profound 'yes' —'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word'—should be our 'yes'. 'Yes' to living out our lives and vocations, with Mary, so as to heal and renew the earth.

The Word of God

The Scriptures speak with different voices. As we saw earlier, Pope Francis has emphatically rejected the notion stemming from Genesis 1:26 that humans are called to 'rule' and 'subdue' the earth. In Luke 1:38, we have Mary speaking as someone called to service. Mary's 'yes' shows her to be both strong and brave and also humble in how she responds to God's call.

Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth'.

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth'. God said, 'See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.' And it was so. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. (Genesis 1:26–31)

And Mary said, 'Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word'. (Luke 1:38)

Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you. (Luke 2:51)

As Christians we were once not greatly aware of the call to care for our planet. Genesis seemed to give us permission to exploit it. But in recent times we have become increasingly aware of the challenge to the planet from human-caused impacts. All three of our most recent Popes—St John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis—have accepted the reality of climate change. And all three have pointed to our moral responsibility to meet its challenge.

The experience of a Teams couple

We have been on a journey as a couple over the past twenty years about care for the earth. We were once fairly oblivious to the impact of our lifestyle on the environment. But we've slowly changed.

We were inspired by the First Peoples of the world, such as Aboriginal Australians, with their deep reverence for their land and humility before the created universe. We also became increasingly aware of the destructive impact of our consumerist society on the environment.

And so we started practising what Pope Francis calls the 'virtuous habits'. Once we had one rubbish bin. Now our council provides three for different waste materials. We also eat less meat, avoid using chemicals in our house and garden, and so on.

This is good and necessary and, as the Pope says, helps to make us mindful of the need to be more prudent with our use of the planet's resources. But we know that it isn't enough.

Our children now are our greatest influence. Our daughters are anguished about the dreadful prospects of global warming for their children. They have joined environmental groups and lobbied politicians. They have also challenged their parents. They firmly expect us to join them in urging our governments, business and the community to take urgent action on climate change. Our grandchildren's lives are at stake. It's not an abstract issue for them.

We have always heeded the Teams' mantra that this is not an activist movement but a place of nurture for active people. Teams has taught us gently—via the wonderful gift of the sit down—to listen to God's voice in our own story. Our Team meetings have also called us to listen deeply as our friends share their stories.

We now are seeking to use those gifts of our movement to listen more attentively to the signs of our times and to do more for what our grandchildren happily call 'Mother Earth'. We are still only beginners on that journey!

More food for thought

If you are short of time, watch this short video of Pope Francis speaking in 2020 on 'An Environmentally Sustainable Lifestyle'. <https://thepopevideo.org/september-respect-for-the-planets-resources/>. (1 minute 25 seconds)

If you do have the time, watch 'The Letter', a film based on *Laudato Si'* that was launched on the feast of St Francis of Assisi in October 2022. <https://theletterfilm.org/watch/>. It runs for 1 hour and 21 minutes.

This beautiful film features activists representing wildlife, Indigenous peoples, young people and the poor—the voices of those who are least listened to, but are the most impacted by the consequences of climate change.

Question for the Sit Down

Fr Caffarel said 'Your heart will always be where your treasure is'. In our present situation, we might ask ourselves: do we treasure planet earth and is caring for it where our heart is?



The Team Meeting

Questions for discussion

- ❖ How have we changed in our awareness of changes to our climate and environment in our country or our part of it in recent times?
- ❖ How have we changed in our behaviours as Christians responding to these developments?
- ❖ Does our experience in Teams prepare us to respond to the Pope's challenge to meet the needs of our planet?
- ❖ If you wish to, share a little about the question you discussed in your Sit Down: Do we treasure planet earth and is caring for it where our heart is?

We pray together

Opening Prayer

All: O God, grant us the grace to grow deeper in our respect of, and care for your Creation. Help us to recognise the sacredness of all your creatures as signs of your wondrous love.

Spark our imagination so we might find new ways to live harmoniously with creation and new technologies to reverse the damage we have done to your Creation.

Help us turn from the selfish consumption of resources meant for all, and to see the impacts of our choices on the poorest and most vulnerable on our planet.

Amen.

- Adapted from Catholic Relief Services (<https://www.crs.org/>)

Reading

Hildegard of Bingen: *O Viridissima Virga*

Listen: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2XBUcC7WqOo> (Latin)

O greenest branch, I greet you,
you who budded in the winds of the questioning of the saints.
The time came for you to blossom in your branches, I salute you!
The sun's heat distilled in you the fragrance of balsam.
For in you bloomed the beautiful flower which gave fragrance to all the dried-out spices.
And they all burgeoned in their strength and greenness.
And because of this, the heavens dropped their dew upon the grass,
And all the earth was made glad, for her womb brought forth wheat,
and the birds of heaven made their nests in her.
From this, humankind is nourished, which brings great joy to the feasters.
Indeed, let us praise the Most High.

Final prayer: A prayer for our earth

Leader: All powerful God, you are present in the whole universe
and in the smallest of your creatures.

You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.

Pour out upon us the power of your love,
that we may protect life and beauty.

All: Fill us with peace, that we may live as brothers and sisters, harming no one.

Leader: O God of the poor,
help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth,
so precious in your eyes.

All: Bring healing to our lives,
that we may protect the world and not prey on it,
that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.

Leader: Touch the hearts of those who look only for gain
at the expense of the poor and the earth.
Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,
to be filled with awe and contemplation,
to recognise that we are profoundly united with every creature
as we journey towards your infinite light.

All: We thank you for being with us each day.
Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle for justice, love and peace.



Meeting 7

They no longer have a family (Loneliness)



Objectives

The aim of this meeting is to give each couple the opportunity to:

- ❖ Recognise that every person will, at some time, experience the feeling of being alone and lacking family.
- ❖ Be encouraged to imitate Mary and the Holy Family as we follow their example.
- ❖ Welcome the experience of solitude as an opportunity to connect with God as Mary did.
- ❖ See how Teams plays an important role in our lives to help deal with loneliness and to embrace solitude.

Before the Meeting

Introduction

According to the German Theologian, Paul Tillich (1886–1965), 'Loneliness expresses the pain of being alone. Solitude expresses the glory of being alone.' The word 'loneliness describes the negative emotions associated with being alone due to isolation and separation, whereas 'solitude' describes a positive experience of choosing to be alone, for example, in order to seek silence, to reflect, to meditate or to pray.

We are well aware of how the COVID-19 lockdowns have caused isolation and loneliness in many countries. People who had perhaps never known loneliness before suddenly experienced disconnection from family, friends, and their parish community. At times, it was

only the new developments in communications technology that allowed us to stay connected to others. Even Mass has been online in many places.

It was also a time to reflect on things that really matter in our life. Many found it a valuable opportunity to slow down and focus more on their spiritual life, through contemplation and silence. These have long been practised in the history of the Church as a way of resting in God's presence and listening with the heart. Two examples are Lectio Divina (established as a monastic practice by St Benedict in the 6th century) and the Spiritual Exercises (developed by St. Ignatius of Loyola in the 16th century).

In this meeting, we will reflect on loneliness and solitude in the life of Jesus and Mary and learn from their example. Both knew what it was grow up in a loving family, but they also understood what it was to be lonely. Consider how alone Jesus felt during his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, and when Peter denied him three times. Imagine the feelings of loneliness which made him cry out 'My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?'

Mary also knew what it is was to feel alone. Imagine how she felt at the moment of the Annunciation as she tried to comprehend the message of the angel; or when she and Joseph lost Jesus for three days before finding him in the temple. Consider, especially, her feelings when she stood at the foot of the Cross. Those of us who have known the grief and loneliness of losing a child, a spouse or parents, or have even experienced a child growing up and leaving home, can draw comfort from Mary's example.

Mary and Jesus drew much consolation and strength from their faith, trusting that God would be with them in their time of need. Jesus understood the value of spending time in solitude for quiet contemplation. Scripture is rich in these examples:

- ❖ 'In the morning, long before dawn, he got up and left the house, and went off to a lonely place and prayed there' (Mark 1:35).
- ❖ '...he withdrew by boat to a lonely place where they could be by themselves' (Matthew 14:13).
- ❖ '... he went out into the hills to pray; and he spent the whole night in prayer to God' (Luke 6:12).

Scripture also tells us that Mary drew strength through quiet contemplation. Although she did not always understand God's plan clearly, she reflected on these things, while patiently waiting for God's plan to be revealed. After the visit of the shepherds following the birth of Jesus, we are told 'Everyone who heard it was astonished at what shepherds had to say. As for Mary, she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart' (Luke 2:18–19). After finding Jesus in the temple, and returning to Nazareth, we are told 'his mother stored up all these things in her heart. (Luke 2:51).

Today, we can learn much from the example of Mary and Jesus. We need periods of solitude to comprehend the mystery of God's message in our lives, but we are also social beings who crave the companionship of others.

By belonging to the Teams Movement, we become part of a community of like-minded people who share our joys and our struggles, a community that protects us from loneliness and also teaches us how to embrace solitude. The Team becomes like a family to us. Like any family,

we need to be sensitive to the needs of other members of our Team. For example, could loneliness be an issue for our Spiritual Counsellor? It is worth asking the question.

The Endeavours are given to us to assist us on our journey of faith. Some of them are also a path to greater insights into the experience of solitude or contemplation, for example, personal prayer, daily reading of the Bible and the annual retreat. Fr Caffarel taught us about the need to encounter Christ through prayer and contemplation. He transmitted it through many of his writings such as the Teams' newsletter, *L'Anneau d'Or*, and his series of booklets on prayer.

While many of us have received support from a loving family and the Church community, sadly there are others who continue to be neglected. Even in our own parish communities, there are still those who are experiencing loneliness and going unnoticed, as the following story reveals. A widow told people after Mass one day that she felt isolated, because, as a now-single woman, she felt she was seen by others as a potential 'threat'. She had found human touch with others was more difficult and almost the only time she had physical touch with another was at the Sign of Peace at Mass. And even this opportunity for human touch was no longer available once social distancing became the norm during the pandemic. As Christian couples, we have the responsibility to be welcoming to others, so that we can truly be 'the gentle smiling face of the Church' (*L'Anneau d'Or*, January 1962).

The Word of God

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary, the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. Seeing his mother and the disciple he loved standing near her, Jesus said to his mother, 'Woman, this is your son'. Then to the disciple he said, 'This is your mother'. And from that moment the disciple made a place for her in his home. (John 19:25–27)

Even as he was on the cross, Jesus knew of the need for family. Mary was invited to have a new 'family', as now John was to take care of her and she would care for him.

The experience of a Teams member

When asked to write a brief witness from my own journey with thoughts of loneliness and isolation and solitude, my thoughts went immediately to last year. My wife was diagnosed with a cancer in June 2020. We have been happily married for almost 50 years and until now we had both enjoyed good health.

I remember taking her to the hospital on the morning of the surgery and the difficult time as I had to leave her at the reception desk. The last hug and pretending to be brave for her was a test. The rules with COVID did not allow me to go any further with her. That was not a nice time and I felt lost and alone. I retreated to the solitude in my car in the car park. There I found I was unable to pray and so I started playing the CD of the Rosary by Dana and Fr Scallon. Although I was unable to concentrate on the words and themes of the Rosary, I was blessed with a sense of peace and calm. The four hours passed much quicker than I had expected and I admit I drifted into a light sleep at times.

When the call eventually came to invite me to come to the ICU Ward to briefly see my wife, I was amazed to find her awake and pain free and admitting she felt safe and at peace. Such a relief! She also told me how she was amazed how calm she had felt when I had to leave her that morning. She felt she had been supported by so many prayers of our family and our special friends in Teams.

The next week went slowly as we were waiting for the pathology results and when they were given to us, along with a very encouraging comment by the surgeon that he felt the results were excellent, we were so relieved and thank God and our family and friends for supporting us during this otherwise lonely journey.

The experience has confirmed for us both that we are not alone. I did experience loneliness, but NOT isolation, and the feeling of solitude and contemplation in the car park and in my bed that first night as I again played the Rosary CD was incredibly comforting. We have been so grateful for our faithful family, our friends and our loving God.

More food for thought

Pope Francis

Pope Francis explores the meaning of family in different contexts. He discusses belonging to the family unit, a 'family of families' in the Church, and then the entire human family:

It is important that people experience the Gospel of the family as a joy that 'fills hearts and lives', because in Christ we have been 'set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness' (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 1)

No one can face life in isolation... We need a community that supports and helps us, in which we can help one another to keep looking ahead... Let us dream, then, as a single human family, as fellow travellers, sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her voice, brothers and sisters all. (*Fratelli Tutti*, 8)

The weakening of faith and religious practice in some societies has an effect on families, leaving them more isolated amid their difficulties. The Synod Fathers noted that 'one symptom of the great poverty of contemporary culture is loneliness, arising from the absence of God in a person's life and the fragility of relationships. There is also a general feeling of powerlessness in the face of socio-cultural realities that oftentimes end up crushing families.' (*Amoris Laetitia*, 43)

Mother Teresa

Mother Teresa spoke from her experience of helping the poor, hungry and sick people on the streets of India who were abandoned and had no family:

But the greatest suffering is being lonely, feeling unloved, having no one. I have come more and more to realise that it is being unwanted that is the worst

disease that any human being can ever experience. There is a terrible hunger for love.

Fr Caffarel

For Father Caffarel, prayer is a very special time of encounter with God, especially contemplative prayer. He never ceased to teach others to pray and to pass on to them what he experienced himself.

This God within you is not a silent God: He speaks, but to hear him you must be still... To be still is difficult in our terribly noisy world... It leads a hectic song-and-dance that disturbs our prayer. Nevertheless, interior silence is possible. To achieve it, one needs to train oneself with patience and gentleness... Listening calls for a certain quality of silence, namely recollection. It is an attentiveness that is fully awake, ready to detect the inner voice. (*L'Anneau d'Or*, May-August 1957)

Questions for the Sit Down

- ❖ Are there times when you feel lonely or isolated?
- ❖ How comfortable do you feel with the idea of being alone with God?
- ❖ Have there been times, as a couple, when you have not been aware of God's presence in your life?



The Team Meeting

Questions for discussion

- ❖ Share times when you have experienced loneliness as an individual, as a couple, or as a family. And what about times when you have experienced the richness of solitude, as an individual or as a couple?
- ❖ Can you truly be lonely if you have a relationship with God?
- ❖ Have you met truly lonely people? What are some ways you help them?
- ❖ The loneliness of ageing is very real. What are your feelings about what you are facing now or in your future?

We pray together

Opening song

I Wish You Peace, by The Eagles (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tq6X7lZouHE>)

I wish you peace when the cold winds blow
Warmed by the fire's glow
I wish you comfort in the, the lonely time
And arms to hold you when you ache inside
I wish you hope when things are going bad
Kind words when times are sad
I wish you shelter from the, the raging wind
Cooling waters at the fever's end

I wish you peace when times are hard
The light to guide you through the dark
And when storms are high and your, your dreams are low

I wish you the strength to let love grow on
I wish you the strength to let love flow
I wish you peace when times are hard
A light to guide you through the dark

And when storms are high and your, you dreams are low
I wish you the strength to let love grown on
I wish you the strength to let love flow on
I wish you the strength to let love glow on
I wish you the strength to let love go

Meditation

Read and reflect on the Word of God passage provided prior to the meeting: John 19:25–27

Consider standing with Mary at the cross. Imagine her pain and try to support her. How does John feel when asked by Jesus to care for Mary as his own mother?

Sharing on the Endeavours

Share a little about your own life's journey in the context of the Endeavours. Perhaps share your experience of the Sit Down this month.

A prayer based on Psalm 23

The Lord is my constant companion,
There is no need that he cannot fulfil.
Whether his course for me points to the mountaintops of glorious ecstasy
Or to the valleys of human suffering,
He is by my side, he is ever present with me.
He is close beside me when I tread the dark streets of danger.
And even when I flirt with death itself,
He will not leave me.
When the pain is severe, he is near to comfort.
When the burden is heavy, he is there to lean upon.
When depression darkens my soul, he touches me with eternal joy.
When I feel empty and alone, he fills the aching vacuum with His power.
My security is in the promise to be near me always, and in the knowledge
That he will never let me go.

- From *Psalms Now* by Leslie F Brandt

Final prayer

Choose one of the following:

- ❖ Prayer for the Beatification of Father Caffarel
- ❖ Magnificat

See 'Prayers for the Meetings' at the end of this document.



Meeting 8

They no longer have dialogue



Visitation - dreamstime_xxl_49058434.jpg. Used with permission.

This lead-light window design is an image of Mary meeting with Elizabeth, two beautiful pregnant women sharing tender love and concern for each other.

Objectives

The aim of this meeting is to give each Team member the opportunity to:

- ❖ Reflect on historical examples of injustices due to the failure to dialogue and consider how Jesus spoke out about injustices in his world.
- ❖ Think about the importance Mary gave to dialogue to show faith, hope and love of God and as a way to build relationships with family and friends.
- ❖ Consider how we might use dialogue to give witness to our faith and in so doing renew Church communities.

Before the Meeting

Introduction

Lessons from history

Throughout the history of humankind, dialogue in the form of language and speech has given humans the ability to communicate their needs, share their knowledge and resolve conflict without violence. Unfortunately, history is full of examples of tragedies caused by a denial of the value of dialogue and this includes faith-based organisations who have struggled to understand this as an essential and practical challenge.

In 1572, there was a massacre in France of between ten thousand and thirty thousand French Protestants. At the World Youth Day gathering in Paris, 525 years later, Pope St John Paul II said:

On the eve of 24 August, we cannot forget the sad massacre of St Bartholomew's Day... Christians did things which the Gospel condemns... I am convinced that only forgiveness, offered and received, leads little by little to a fruitful dialogue, which will in turn ensure a fully Christian reconciliation... Belonging to different religious traditions must not constitute today a source of opposition and tension. On the contrary, our common love for Christ impels us to seek tirelessly the path of full unity. (*Address at the Baptismal Vigil with Young People*, Paris, 23 August 1997)

There are many other historical examples when people have done terrible things to one another under the banner of strong faith. In every case, these cruel, sinful and inhumane acts have been characterised by the absence of meaningful, open and charitable dialogue.

Today, Pope Francis is calling the Church to renew our faith by using dialogue. He is working hard to move the Church—clergy and lay people—to dialogue more effectively and productively. Indeed, the focus of the 16th General Assembly of Bishops is on synodality, the first step of which is deep listening to all the baptised.

Mary and Jesus give us important insights

Mary provides us with an example of responsiveness towards others in need when she visited her cousin Elizabeth who was six months pregnant (Luke 1:36). She remained with her for about three months (Luke 1:56) and it is quite probable she was there when Elizabeth's son, John the Baptist, was born. This experience would have helped Mary prepare for her own confinement due not long afterwards. Mary's response to the angel Gabriel 'be it done to me according to your word' (Luke 1:38) declares her unconditional giving of herself, a giving recognised by Elizabeth when she said to Mary 'Blessed is the fruit of your womb' (Luke 1:42), a phrase familiar to us now in the 'Hail Mary' prayer. Mary's reply began with the words 'My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my saviour' (Luke 1:46). This is the start of the Magnificat, a beautiful, open and trusting dialogue with God; a dialogue that shows Mary as a model of servant leadership.

Jesus used strong and powerful words when he drove the vendors out of the Temple (Matthew 21:12–17; Mark 11:15–18; John 2:13–23). On other occasions, he condemned the abuse of power, self-interest and the accumulation of wealth that deprived the poor and denounced the hypocrisy and self-satisfaction of the scribes and the Pharisees (Luke 11:37–53; 20:45–47).

Brave, selfless acts, like these by Jesus and Mary, are powerful reminders that humanity can only grow in wisdom and compassion if there is listening with a mind and heart in tune with Gospel values and there is open, honest, respectful and free speech.

As Pope Francis explains in *Amoris Laetitia* (136), dialogue within the family is essential. The Endeavour of the Sit Down, where we dialogue openly and honestly in the presence of God, helps us as couples to practise and give witness to this way of living in our world.

The Word of God

The passages from Scripture in this section reinforce the importance of the visit by Mary to her cousin Elizabeth and how this teaches us about dialogue.

There are eleven prophecies in the Old Testament referring to the birth of Jesus. One example is ‘Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: the young woman will conceive and will give birth to a son, who will be called Emmanuel’ (Isaiah 7:14). We know from Luke’s gospel that Mary and Elizabeth were familiar with these prophecies. The following Scripture passage seems to be saying that Mary wanted to share her news with someone she could trust and whom she knew would understand:

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord has come to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord’. (Luke 1:39–45)

This passage is followed by Mary’s extraordinary and prophetic song of praise: the Magnificat (Luke 1:46–56). Her life of service started at the Annunciation with her ‘yes’ to motherhood and family and, at Calvary, to the people of God. She used prayer to dialogue with God and intercede for us. We too can pray, speak up and speak out to serve others; in our families, our parishes and throughout the world. Indeed, Pope Francis encourages us to use dialogue within our Church to establish a more synodal servant approach to leadership as modelled for us by Jesus and Mary. He wants the message of Jesus to be heard and understood by the people of our time. Lay people, including Teams’ couples, need to stand up and be heard.

The experience of a Teams member

I am the oldest of four daughters so, as soon as I was old enough, I would help my father whilst he was fixing something in our home or constructing something in the garden outside our home. I enjoyed working with him and I learnt many practical skills as he explained what he was doing and I watched him using tools to complete the work. He would tell stories about his own childhood in another country and I was in awe of what he could do. Our time together was special and I knew my help was appreciated. Indeed, I know this experience influenced me to pursue the career I took up after I left school.

In later years, my sisters shared the role of father's helper. I became not so willing to be his helper because I was preoccupied with my own interests and activities. After all, I had to spend a lot more time on school homework and then university studies. As a teenager, I was developing some ideas about how I wanted to live my life that were different than the views I thought my father held. We began to argue and it seemed like we couldn't agree about anything. We stubbornly held onto our separate views about everything and in so doing caused a lot of unnecessary stress and anger in our household. This tension developed to the point where I did not want to speak with my father and I certainly wouldn't listen if he tried to be kind and loving towards me.

A cousin told me about a job I could do in another city. This sounded like a great opportunity and maybe a way forward for me to become more independent and more mature. My mother was excited for me but my father did not want me to go. I could see he was worried about my safety but I wanted him to trust me and feel comfortable about my move to another city. I realised I needed to begin listening to his concerns and then reassure him that I respected his concerns that I might cause him to worry about me. We had several conversations where we both listened carefully to one another and shared our hopes and concerns. After this, he was happy for me to take up the position and it helped him to know that I would start off living with my cousin and her family.

In Luke's gospel, we hear about Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth, before their babies are born. The reading highlights for me that without listening there can be no dialogue. 'Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting' and she responded excitedly and lovingly by saying 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed be the fruit of your womb'. The exchange between Mary and Elizabeth that is described in this reading is a powerful reminder that true and loving dialogue can only be achieved if we listen with an open and trusting heart. My father and I learnt this lesson the hard way. We endured needless heartache and caused unnecessary upset in our family because we were too stubborn to listen to each other and respect our different views. I thank God we learnt to listen to each other and in so doing heal our relationship.

More food for thought

Father Caffarel

Father Caffarel's editorial in the January 1960 issue of the Equipes Notre Dame publication *L'Anneau D'or* was adapted from a talk he gave to the annual International Conference of the Movement in Rome in November 1959. He reflected on the process of authentic dialogue that

has occurred during the gathering when all present listened and shared with one another about 'the ambition of our Movement'. He said:

For the past forty-eight hours, we have lived again through a great experience of fraternal life. This fraternity that we experience at all levels, Team, Sector, Region, never shows its richness better than at such supra-national gatherings. Each time a frontier is crossed, we have the feelings of a wonderful broadening of soul. This is true at the human level, but even more true at the Christian level. At the very depth of our being, as baptised people, there is the feeling, the desire, the taste of universality. In the heart of every Christian, is to be found the Church's ability to gather within itself people of all races, of all languages, of all colours, of all conditions.

Pope Francis

In 2019, on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, Pope Francis reflected on Mary's response to God's call to become the mother of Jesus by saying:

In order to be filled [with the Spirit] it is necessary to make room, to empty oneself, to step aside. Just as Mary did, she who knew how to listen to the Word of God and trust totally in his will, accepting it unreservedly in her own life. So much so that the Word became flesh in her. This was possible thanks to her 'yes'. To the Angel who asks her to be ready to become the mother of Jesus, Mary replies: 'Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word' (Luke 1:38).

Mary does not lose herself in reasoning, she does not place obstacles in the Lord's way but she promptly entrusts herself and makes room for the action of the Holy Spirit...

I would also like to underline the word with which Mary defines herself in her surrender to God: she professes herself 'the handmaid of the Lord'. Mary's 'yes' to God takes on from the beginning the attitude of service, of attention to the needs of others. The visit to Elizabeth which immediately follows the Annunciation testifies this concretely. One's availability to God is found in one's willingness to take on the needs of one's neighbour. (*Address of Pope Francis on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, 8 December 2019.)

Pope Francis: *Fratelli Tutti*

Pope Francis' exhortation *Fratelli Tutti* is devoted to an exploration of the many barriers that exist in today's world that restrict open dialogue and friendly neighbourliness amongst people. He speaks of 'globalization and progress without a shared roadmap' resulting in greater inequality and disenfranchisement of those who 'have not' when he says:

It frequently becomes clear that, in practice, human rights are not equal for all. Respect for those rights 'is the preliminary condition for a country's social and economic development. When the dignity of the human person is respected,

and his or her rights recognised and guaranteed, creativity and interdependence thrive, and the creativity of the human personality is released through actions that further the common good.' (*Fratelli Tutti*, 22)

He goes on to consider the media, including social media, as systems that limit rather than facilitate real dialogue by saying 'Dialogue is often confused with something quite different: the feverish exchange of opinions on social networks' (200), and 'Lack of dialogue means that in these individual sectors people are concerned not for the common good, but for the benefits of power or, at best, for ways to impose their own ideas' (202).

Pope Francis: *Amoris Laetitia*

Chapter 4 in *Amoris Laetitia* is especially recommended to Teams couples to read and study, together with their whole Team. Pope Francis discusses love in marriage and highlights the importance of dialogue as central to our conjugal relationship. He says:

Dialogue is essential for experiencing, expressing and fostering love in marriage and family life. Yet it can only be the fruit of a long and demanding apprenticeship. Men and women, young people and adults, communicate differently. They speak different languages and they act in different ways. (*Amoris Laetitia*, 136)

Take time, quality time. This means being ready to listen patiently and attentively to everything the other person wants to say. It requires the self-discipline of not speaking until the time is right. Instead of offering an opinion or advice, we need to be sure that we have heard everything the other person has to say... Do not be rushed, put aside all of your own needs and worries, and make space. Often the other spouse does not need a solution to his or her problems, but simply to be heard, to feel that somebody has acknowledged their pain, their disappointment, their fear, their anger, their hopes and their dreams. (*Amoris Laetitia*, 137)

Keep an open mind. Don't get bogged down in your own limited ideas and opinions but be prepared to change and expand them. (*Amoris Laetitia*, 139)

Finally, let us acknowledge that for worthwhile dialogue we have to have something to say. This can only be the fruit of an interior richness nourished by reading, personal reflection, prayer and openness to the world around us. Otherwise, conversations become boring and trivial. (*Amoris Laetitia*, 141)

Questions for the Sit Down

We suggest you choose one of these questions that is relevant for yourselves to prepare for the Team meeting.

- ❖ How do we dialogue as a couple and family? Are there some areas that are out of bounds, and do we need to do something to improve this?

- ❖ Do we know our neighbours? What can we do to make our neighbourhood, clubs, local school or parish more friendly and compassionate?
- ❖ How do we use our wealth, social media and the Internet to assist others in our family and wider community to live life 'abundantly' and be all that we can be?



The Team Meeting

Questions for discussion

- ❖ What are the barriers within our family or our Team that restrict an open dialogue with our children, other family or Team's members?
- ❖ What can we do as a Team, as a Sector or as a Region to dialogue openly with our bishops and priests?
- ❖ How do we use social media? Do we need to review the impact it has on our lives or that of our children? How can we use it for good and more effectively to promote the Teams Movement?

We pray together

An Ecumenical Christian Prayer

Pope Francis encourages us to dialogue with our fellow Christians. The following prayer comes from the conclusion of *Fratelli Tutti*.

O God, Trinity of love,
from the profound communion of your divine life,
pour out upon us a torrent of fraternal love.

Grant us the love reflected in the actions of Jesus, in his family of Nazareth,
and in the early Christian community.

Grant that we Christians may live the Gospel, discovering Christ in each human being,
recognising him crucified in the sufferings of the abandoned and forgotten of our world,

and risen in each brother or sister who makes a new start.
Come, Holy Spirit, show us your beauty, reflected in all the peoples of the earth,
so that we may discover anew that all are important
and all are necessary, different faces of the one humanity that God so loves.
Amen.

Reading

Read and reflect on the Word of God passage provided prior to the meeting: Luke 1:39–45.

Prayer for our community

Loving God,
You fill all things with a fullness and hope that we can never comprehend.
Thank you for leading us into a time
where more of reality is being unveiled for us all to see.
We pray that you will take away our natural temptation for cynicism, denial, fear and despair.
Help us have the courage to awaken to greater truth, greater humility,
and greater care for one another.
May we place our hope in what matters and what lasts,
trusting in your eternal presence and love.
Listen to our hearts' longings for the healing of our suffering world.

(Please add your own intentions ...)

Knowing, good God, that you are hearing us better than we are speaking,
we offer these prayers in all the holy names of God.
Amen.

- Richard Rohr Centre for Action and Contemplation (<https://cac.org/>)

Song: 'The Sound of Silence'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ukmjBSQY-c>

Hello darkness, my old friend
I've come to talk with you again
Because a vision softly creeping
Left its seeds while I was sleeping
And the vision that was planted in my brain
Still remains
Within the sound of silence

In restless dreams I walked alone
Narrow streets of cobblestone
'Neath the halo of a street lamp
I turned my collar to the cold and damp
When my eyes were stabbed by the flash of a neon light
That split the night
And touched the sound of silence

And in the naked light I saw
Ten thousand people, maybe more
People talking without speaking
People hearing without listening
People writing songs that voices never share
And no one dared
Disturb the sound of silence

'Fools' said I, 'You do not know
Silence like a cancer grows
Hear my words that I might reach you
Take my arms that I might reach you'
But my words, like silent raindrops fell
And echoed in the wells of silence

And the people bowed and prayed
To the neon god they made
And the sign flashed out its warning
In the words that it was forming
And the sign said, 'The words of the prophets
Are written on the subway walls
And tenement halls'
And whispered in the sounds of silence'

- Songwriter: Paul Simon. The Sound of Silence lyrics © Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC, Universal Music Publishing Group. Source: LyricFind

Sharing on the Endeavours

Share a little about your own life's journey in the context of the Endeavours,
OR,

Use the Endeavour of the annual retreat to review and renew our commitment to dialogue as couples and within our families, and to build synodal relationships in our parishes and dioceses.

Final prayer

Choose one of the following:

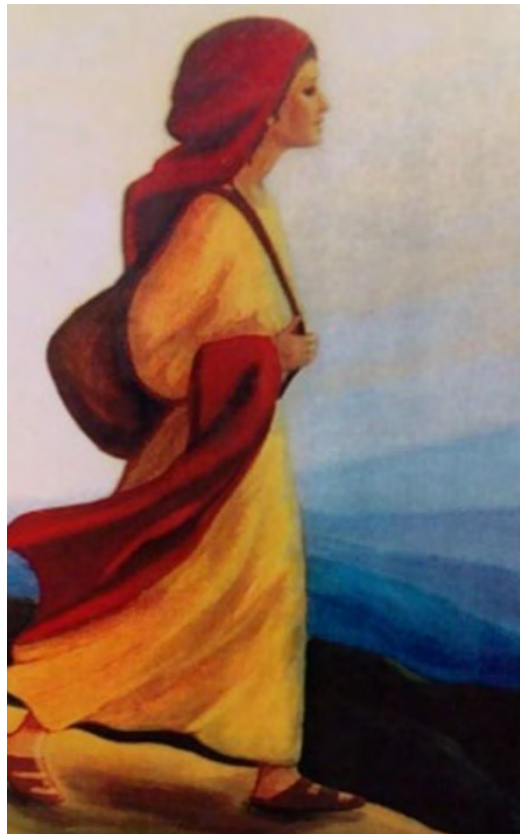
- ❖ Prayer for the Beatification of Father Caffarel
- ❖ Magnificat

See 'Prayers for the Meetings' at the end of this document.



Meeting 9

What is your mission? What do you have that others do not have?



Objectives

The aim of this meeting is to give each couple the opportunity to:

- ❖ Draw together the previous discussion topics and give them a missionary focus. The image of Mary striding towards Elizabeth captures this.
- ❖ 'All to Jesus through Mary. All to Mary for Jesus' is a motto of Marists worldwide and highlights that Jesus and the mission must be our focus, and that Mary models that discipleship for us.
- ❖ Appreciate that when our understanding of Mary allows her to be human like us, she becomes more important for all of us.

Before the Meeting

Introduction

Mary is a much-loved figure in the Church, with many titles. Do we look at her any differently now that we have been thinking about her over these last eight meetings? As we have worked through each of the chapters of this study, we have focused on Mary's humanity and have come to know her in a more personal way. She is someone we can relate to in our daily lives and draw from her qualities. She was the wife of Joseph, the mother of Jesus, a supportive friend to Elizabeth, a grieving mother standing at the foot of the cross, and the first disciple. She was human, and like us she had to step forward in faith, even when God's plan was unclear to her.

We can learn much from the humanity of Mary

This final chapter uses an image of Mary striding determinedly across the hills on her way to visit her cousin Elizabeth. Luke's Gospel tells us that just after being told she would give birth to the saviour, she headed off to visit her already pregnant cousin. Mary, a pregnant woman travelling alone across harsh countryside—what does that say about her? Where was Joseph? We aren't told in Luke's story, but one wonders if the decision for her to travel alone was a statement of the sacrifice that is often involved in loving our neighbour. Joseph not being beside Mary through this time would have been tough for both of them. The expression 'love isn't love until you give it away' perhaps captures what occurred with Mary and Joseph. How has this played out in your own married life?

There is a beautiful but brief scene in Mel Gibson's film 'The Passion of the Christ' where Mary is simply having fun with her teenage son, Jesus, at home in the village at Nazareth. It speaks eloquently of a beautiful, intimate friendship between mother and son. Is this an image of Mary that you can relate to? How does this speak into our lives and our relationship with Jesus? 'Love one another as I have loved you' is Jesus' plea to us (John 13:34).

A few years ago, a number of Marist lay women were interviewed about their relationship with Mary. They responded that it had been difficult to relate to Mary when she was presented to them as a model of perfection, a consequence of thinking in past centuries that focused less on Mary's human qualities. Fortunately, the Church began to clarify this in Chapter 8 of the document *Lumen Gentium* ('The Light of the Nations') at the Second Vatican Council (1962–65).

Renowned German theologian Karl Rahner provided additional insights into this message:

We must focus on Mary not as a heavenly being, but as a human person, as active and suffering for herself and others, as learning in the midst of many uncertainties, as accepting her function in salvation history in faith, hope and love, and by this very fact, as model and mother of believers (*Theological Investigations*, Vol 19.)

So, how then do we understand and appreciate Mary as the first among disciples, and a model for us in our lives today? In his May 1949 editorial, Fr Caffarel wrote:

You come together to seek Christ, to imitate him, to serve him. You will not succeed without a guide and there is no better guide than Mary. I would like us, in our Teams, to nurture a faith in the all-powerful tender care of Our Lady and that every couple should experience the trust and security that little children feel in the presence of their mother. I would like this to be one of our characteristics—I would then have great confidence in the future. (Editorial in *L'Anneau d'Or*, May 1949)

We can learn from Mary how there is strength in our own humanity

As we come to this last meeting, let us be clear that, apart from material circumstances, we as Teams members do not have anything that others do not have. We are all born 'in the image and likeness of God' (Gen 1:28). We are all saved by the action of God through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Salvation is a gift offered to all human beings. For God there is no such thing as 'haves' and 'have nots' in this world. John's gospel 15:15 says: 'No longer do I call you servants, because a servant does not know what his master's business is. Instead, I call you friends, since I have made known to you everything I learned from my Father.' That means all of us! Paul's letter to the Galatians 3:26–28 has this to say: 'Now, in Christ Jesus, all of you are children of God through faith. All of you, through baptism in Christ, have put on Christ. There is no longer any distinction between Jew and Greek, or between slave and freeman, or between man and woman; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.'

Taking up our mission and stepping out in faith

Our mission as members of Equipes Notre Dame is to love the world the way Jesus did. Jesus challenged established authorities who had lost their way; he focused on the ordinary everyday person; he empowered women; and he attended the poor and marginalised. It is worth noting that the consistent message of prophets throughout the Hebrew Scriptures was to look after the widows, foreigners and orphans—the outcasts and powerless in society (Isaiah 10:1–2). For us today, who are these people? That is a question that all of us need to answer truthfully.

Living out that love, as Jesus calls us to do, can be challenging and tough and often counter-cultural. Being a true follower of Jesus involves stepping out in faith and confronting the unknown. Consider Mary's unconditional 'yes' at the Annunciation and being given into the care of the disciple by her dying son at the foot of the cross. 'From that moment the disciple took her into his home' (John 19:27), and through the ages, this has been interpreted as Jesus also asking us to take Mary into our home.

This is now our mission—making Jesus known and loved, just as Mary did.

The Word of God

Mary's first action after the Annunciation was to care for someone else, Elizabeth. Would you have done the same?

'Even your relative Elizabeth is expecting a son in her old age, although she was unable to have a child, and she is in her sixth month. With God nothing is

impossible.’ Then Mary said, ‘I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me as you have said.’ And the angel left her.

At that time Mary went as quickly as she could to a town in the hills of Judah. She entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leapt in her womb. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and crying out loudly, she said, ‘You are the most blessed among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb. How is it that the mother of my Lord comes to me? The moment your greeting sounded in my ears, the baby within me suddenly leapt for joy. Blessed are you who believed that the Lord’s word would come true!’ (Luke 1:36–45)

Reflection by Vivienne Goldstein SM, a former Provincial of Australian Marist Sisters

Which Mary?

A few years ago, I was talking with a priest friend about the desire the Marist Sisters have to make Mary present in today’s world.

His response is etched sharply in my memory ‘Which Mary, Viv? Which Mary are you trying to present in our world?’ I was shocked by the realisation that I had never really thought deeply about that question. During the brief discussion which ensued we made a fleeting journey down through the ages, tracing the vast development in the theology of Mary from the thinking behind titles like ‘Queen of Heaven’ through to the Second Vatican Council’s clear perception of Mary as the first disciple of Jesus and its placement of her not above or beyond the Church—but at its heart.

Finally, my sparring partner asked me, ‘Is your Mary the woman who proclaimed the Magnificat—one of the strongest statements about justice to be found in Scripture? At that moment I had the disturbing thought that the woman of justice may have been done a terrible injustice through some of our portrayals of her—attempts to almost divinize her and the images—delicate and beautiful but possibly too perfect—suggesting that she would never say a word in anything but dulcet tones.

‘Which Mary?’—the question remained with me until one June day when I was introduced to a poem about Mary by Noel Davis. He begins: ‘Whatever happened to Wild Mary, to that spirited village woman...who broke the chains and shattered the moulds that tried to tame and angel her?’ From there he goes on to paint the most exciting picture of Mary that has ever been placed before me. Her portrait also strikes me as the most realistic of those I know.

Perhaps it is because of my Jewish heritage that this image of Mary evokes such a response from me. Certainly, the Jewish women I have known are powerful women. An aunt who played a particularly vital part in my earlier life left an indelible impression of strong feminine beauty, a passionate love of family, an acute sense of justice, a commitment to truth and a very definite selection of likes and dislikes. In later life she carried the agony of her cancer with quiet dignity. I thought of my Jewish aunt as an orchid in the garden of life. Why, then, have I been satisfied with descriptions of Mary which are more reminiscent of a retiring violet? With my background it’s no wonder that, while I loved her, I had no sense of being

able to identify with Mary. However, these days she is becoming increasingly a woman of deep inner strength, passionate and not perfectly balanced.

So, wherever you are, Noel Davis, you and the Holy Spirit have ensured that I now believe in passionate Mary. I will be celebrating life with her and entering as deeply as I dare into the adventure she seems to be inviting me to share.

More food for thought

We are all sent out on mission. It is our responsibility as members of the Church community. Pope Francis is continually calling us to discipleship, emulating the example of Mary.

Fr Caffarel

The Teams of Our Lady, a Church community, are missionary communities. And if one day they were no longer missionary, they would no longer be a church community. (*Les END: Their mission*, 1957)

Pope Francis

And, in fact, I would like to insist on this missionary role of the Equipes Notre Dame. Every committed couple certainly receives much of what it lives in its Team, and its conjugal life is deepened, perfecting itself thanks to the spirituality of the Movement. However, after having received from Christ and from the Church, a Christian is irresistibly sent out to witness and transmit what they have received. (Excerpts from Pope Francis' *Address to Equipes Notre Dame*, 10 September 2015)

We were created for a fulfilment that can only be found in love. We cannot be indifferent to suffering; we cannot allow anyone to go through life as an outcast. Instead, we should feel indignant, challenged to emerge from our comfortable isolation and to be changed by our contact with human suffering. That is the meaning of dignity. (*Fratelli Tutti*, 68)

Today we have a great opportunity to express our innate sense of fraternity, to be Good Samaritans who bear the pain of other people's troubles... Like the chance traveller in the parable, we need only have a pure and simple desire to be a people, a community, constant and tireless in the effort to include, integrate and uplift the fallen. (*Fratelli Tutti*, 77)

Noel Davis

Noel Davis was a prolific Australian Catholic poet who wrote about nature and its intimate connection to the human experience. In this poem 'Wild Mary', he uses his imagination to explore the humanity of Mary. It is taken from his book, *Campfire of the heart*.

Wild Mary

Whatever happened to Wild Mary, to that spirited village woman,
full of life, expectancy,
who broke the chains and shattered the moulds
that tried to tame and angel her?
Vibrant young woman,
life taught her a thing or two. So much like her mother and grandmother.
Strong breed! Loved storytellers of family epics and the everyday.

Well known at the markets and about town for their warmth, shrewd business sense and strong family ties. Always there when needed, thrusters, unflinching when what was needed came clear.

O how she laughed at the crazy things that happened about the house.
Made time for quiet in her full days. Talked long with Joseph about their lives, the budget,
their hopes, concerns, dreams for their son
and how he was growing up so fast.

Petrified she was of snakes and heights and got so angry when she saw justice denied
or her fellow folk put down as second rate. Hated olives, lambs liver and being ripped off.
Loved char-grilled fish fresh from Galilee.

Jesus her son no doubt. That same wild streak ran through him.
Liz's son the same. Real passion for what they were on about.
Nothing dilute in their veins. Too strong for the establishment of the day.

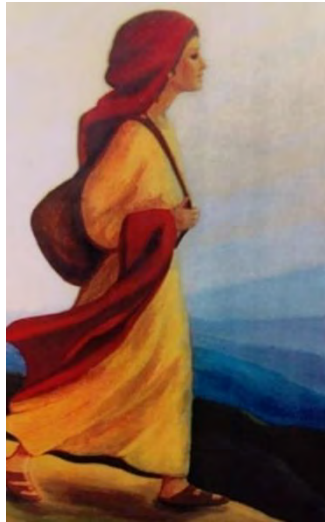
Yes her spirit lives on among us, bold, breaking out, overflowing,
too at one with Life to die – her heart with the hurting and being with the afraid;
by the cross of those being crucified and cradling those in pain;
standing her ground amid the violence of evil's disarray;
taking full on those who dare try keep her in her place; unflinching in her bold defiance
of those who conspire to perpetrate submission or threaten love's advance.

We need but call out confidently – Mary! Mary! for her spirit to empower ours.
Oh Yes! It's a passionate spirit, the spirit of Mary
that breaks the chains and shatters the moulds
that try to stifle the full reality of her humanity!

- Noel Davis, *Campfire of the heart: being there and sipping water from life's cuppa* (Shekinah Creative Ministry, 1994).

Question for the Sit Down

As we come to this last meeting, what has resonated with me/us through these meetings?
Take time to share a prayer of gratitude and praise.



The Team Meeting

Questions for discussion

- ❖ Is there anything blocking me from saying 'yes' as Mary did? Fear? Commitment? Unworthiness?
- ❖ How well can I relate to a Mary who was an ordinary village woman with dust on her feet?
- ❖ What am I (or we as a Team) prepared to commit to now as my/our mission in the Church?

We pray together

Prayer to the Holy Spirit

Holy Spirit,
the Love that exists between the Father and the Son
enfold us in that Love as we begin our prayer.
Embolden us to deepen even further our married and community relationships
as we respond to the need to make a real difference in our world.
We ask our Mother Mary to also walk with us.
We make this prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reading

Read and reflect on the Word of God passage provided prior to the meeting (Luke 1:36–45).

Sharing on the Endeavours

Share a little about your own life's journey in the context of the Endeavours.

Litany of Mary of Nazareth

<u>Leader:</u> Glory to you, God our Creator,	<u>Response:</u> Breathe into us new life, new meaning.
Glory to you, God our Saviour,	Lead us in the way of peace and justice.
Glory to you, healing Spirit,	Transform us to empower others.

Mary, wellbeing of peace,	Be our guide
Model of strength,	
Model of gentleness,	
Model of trust,	
Model of courage,	
Model of patience,	
Model of risk,	
Model of openness,	
Model of perseverance,	

Mother of the liberator,	Pray for us
Mother of the homeless,	
Mother of the dying,	
Mother of the nonviolent,	
Widowed mother,	
Unwed mother,	
Mother of a political prisoner,	
Mother of the condemned,	
Mother of the executed criminal,	

Oppressed woman,	Lead us to life
Liberator of the oppressed,	
Marginalised woman,	
Comforter of the afflicted,	
Cause of our joy,	
Sign of contradiction,	
Breaker of bondage,	
Political refugee,	
Seeker of sanctuary,	
First disciple,	
Sharer in Christ's ministry,	
Participant in Christ's passion,	
Seeker of God's will,	
Witness to Christ's resurrection,	

Woman of mercy,
Woman of faith,
Woman of contemplation,
Woman of vision,
Woman of wisdom and understanding,
Woman of grace and truth,
Woman pregnant with hope,
Woman cantered on God,

Empower us

Mary, Queen of Peace, we entrust our lives to you. Shelter us from war, hatred and oppression. Teach us to live in peace, to educate ourselves for peace. Inspire us to act justly, to revere all God has made. Root peace firmly in our hearts and in our world. Amen.

- from *The Fire of Peace: A Prayer Book*.

Compiled and edited by Mary Lou Kownacki, OSB. Pax Christi USA

Closing Song: Sing of a Lady (Liam Lawton)

<https://youtu.be/kO0cRWPUP8k>

Let us sing of a maiden, let us sing of a girl
who spoke with the angel saying yes to the Lord.
Let us sing of a maiden, let us sing of a girl
who bowed to the Spirit and gave life to the Word.

Refrain:

So come and sing with me.
We'll raise a joyful song to lead the world
From dark to light and turn to right from wrong.
So come and sing with me a hymn of joyful praise:
Ave Maria, Ave Maria, Ave Maria, the hope of all our days

Let us sing of a mother, let us sing of her life,
who searched for her boy child through day and through night.
Let us sing of a mother, let us sing of a sign,
with Jesus at Cana, to drink the new wine. **Refrain**

Let us sing of a woman, let us sing of her tears,
who watched as they nailed him, her love, to a tree.
Let us sing of a woman, let us sing of her fears,
who held his face gently and washed him with tears. **Refrain**

Let us sing of a lady, let us sing of a crown;
who prayed in the silence as the Spirit poured down.
Let us sing of a lady, let us sing of a crown,
the hope of all people whose love here abounds. **Refrain**

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Final prayer

Choose one of the following:

- ❖ Prayer for the Beatification of Father Caffarel
- ❖ Magnificat

See 'Prayers for the Meetings' at the end of this document.



Go now with compassion and determination
on your mission
to make Jesus known as Mary did



Prayers for the meetings

Prayer for the Beatification of Fr. Caffarel

God, our Father,
You planted deep in the heart of your servant, Henri Caffarel,
a fountain of love, which bound him totally to your Son
and inspired him with a wonderful capacity to speak of Him.
A prophet for our time, he revealed the dignity and beauty of the vocation of every person
in the words Jesus addresses to each of us: 'Come follow me.'
He made couples enthusiastic about the greatness of the sacrament of marriage,
the sign of Christ's fruitful love for the Church and of His union with her.
He showed that priests and couples are called to live a vocation of love.
He was a guide to widows: love is stronger than death.
Prompted by the Holy Spirit, he accompanied many Christians on the path of prayer.
Seized by a devouring fire, he was a dwelling place for you, Lord.
God, our Father, through the intercession of Our Lady,
we ask you to hasten the day when the Church will proclaim the holiness of his life,
so that people everywhere will discover the joy of following your Son,
in accordance with their particular vocation in the Holy Spirit.

The Magnificat (Luke 1: 46–55)

(Inclusive language version)

And Mary said:
'My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
for God has looked with favour on the lowliness of the Almighty's servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is God's name.
God's mercy is for those who fear God
from generation to generation.
God has shown strength with God's arm;
God has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
God has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
God has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
God has helped servant Israel, in remembrance of God's mercy,
—according to the promise God made to our ancestors—
of God's mercy to Abraham and his descendants for ever.'

The Magnificat (Luke 1: 46–55)

(Common version)

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
for he has looked with favour on his humble servant.
From this day all generations will call me blessed,
For the Almighty has done great things for me;
holy is his name.
His mercy reaches from age to age for those who fear him
in every generation.
He has shown the strength of his arm,
he has scattered the proud of heart.
He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
and has lifted up the lowly.
He has filled the hungry with good things,
the rich sent empty away.
He has come to the help of Israel his servant, mindful of his mercy
—the mercy promised to our ancestors—
to Abraham and his children for ever.

The Hail Mary

(A contemporary version)

Rejoice, Mariam, highly favoured one,
God is with you.
You are blessed among women,
And the fruit of your womb, Jesus, is blessed.
Holy Mariam, the God-bearer,
Pray for us sinners,
Now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

- Translation by Margaret Hebblethwaite, *The Tablet*, 25 March 2023, p. 7. According to Hebblethwaite, “Mariam” is the original Aramaic form of “Mary” and is probably what Mary would have been called by her family and friends.

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This discussion resource was produced by the Oceania Super-Region of the Teams for Married Spirituality movement (Equipes Notre Dame).

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Acknowledgements

Many people contributed to the development of this resource. Thanks are due especially to the former and current Oceania Leading Couples, Chris and John Dighton, and Petra Ball and Terry McDevitt, respectively, to the other members of the Oceania Super-Regional Team, and to Kevin Taylor.

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